

Sūrah Yāsīn

Central Theme and Relationship with the Previous Sūrah

There is no essential difference between the central theme of this *sūrah* and that of the last two *sūrahs* of this group. This *sūrah* also discusses the topics of monotheism, prophethood and the hereafter discussed in the previous *sūrahs*. However, there exists a difference in them with respect to conciseness and comprehensiveness and in the nature of reasoning. Some of the topics discussed in the earlier *sūrahs* are further substantiated through arguments drawn from history and human nature. The *sūrah* begins with an affirmation of prophethood – the topic on which the previous *sūrah* ended. If one deliberates on this *sūrah* with regard to the philosophy of religion it becomes evident that like the previous *sūrahs* it is based on gratitude and what it entails.

In the following paragraphs, an analysis of the *sūrah* discourse is presented; the central theme of the *sūrah* and its coherence will *inshallāh* will become evident from it.

Analysis of the Discourse

Verses (1-12): The prophethood of Muḥammad (sws) is substantiated and he is given assurance that the Qur’ān replete with wisdom is the greatest evidence to the fact that he is a messenger of God and is calling people towards the straight the path. The Qur’ān is a great favour from the Almighty and powerful God to people who till then were deprived of any divine guidance and were wandering astray. It is their mere misfortune that because of arrogance they are denying it. Their past traditions and future desires have become an impediment to them; for this reason, they are neither learning any lesson from the past nor are they caring for the future. The Prophet (sws) is told to not be worried for such unworried people. He should give glad tidings of a great reward to those who fear God and are prepared to listen to be counseled. He should leave the matter of those who do not listen to God. He has recorded all their deeds and is enough to deal with them.

Verses (13-32): In order to make the Quraysh learn a lesson, an example of a city is cited where two messengers were sent by God to warn its people. When they did not listen to these two messengers, the Almighty sent a third individual to help these messengers; however, they did not

even pay heed to him. The signs which manifested themselves during this time to warn them were regarded as bad luck brought by the messengers and threatened to stone them for this crime. Finally, the Almighty destroyed this city through His punishment.

Verses (23-44): An allusion is made to some of the signs of God's power, wisdom, providence and mercy found in this universe. It is stated that all these signs entail gratitude to God and the essential requirement of this gratitude is monotheism. These signs also entail a day of reward and punishment.

Verses (45-50): It is stated that when people are warned of God's punishment and asked to save themselves from it by spending for His cause, they stubbornly demand this punishment and further say that why should they spend on those whom God has deprived of His blessings. These people should remember that when God intends to bring His punishment He will not need any preparation; it will come in the blink of an eye and catch everyone unaware.

Verses (51-65): The events of the Day of Judgement are portrayed and the fates of the believers and rejecters are depicted.

Verses (66-68): Those who were demanding the punishment are warned that they should benefit from the abilities of sight and hearing which the Almighty has blessed them with and also use their intellect. If they do not benefit from these abilities God can also disfigure them, and this task is not very difficult for Him at all.

Verses (69-83): In this closing section of the *sūrah* what was discussed in the opening one is taken up again in a different style. Attention is drawn to some signs of monotheism and the Hereafter and the Prophet (sws) is also assured that his task is to awaken those who are alive; his calls will not effect those who are morally dead.

Section I: Verses (1-12)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يس (١) وَالْقُرْآنِ الْحَكِيمِ (٢) إِنَّكَ لَمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ (٣) عَلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ (٤) تَنْزِيلَ الْعَزِيزِ الرَّحِيمِ (٥) لِنُنذِرَ قَوْمًا مَّا أُنذِرَ آبَاؤُهُمْ فَهُمْ غَافِلُونَ (٦) لَقَدْ حَقَّ الْقَوْلُ عَلَى أَكْثَرِهِمْ فَهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ (٧) إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا فِي أَعْنَاقِهِمْ أَغْلَالًا فَفِيهَا إِلَى الْأَذْقَانِ فَهُمْ مُقْمَحُونَ (٨) وَجَعَلْنَا مِنْ بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ سَدًّا وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ سَدًّا فَأَغْشَيْنَاهُمْ فَهُمْ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ (٩) وَسَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ أَأَنذَرْتَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تُنذِرْهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ (١٠) إِنَّمَا تُنذِرُ مَنِ اتَّبَعَ الذِّكْرَ وَخَشِيَ

الرَّحْمَنُ بِالْغَيْبِ فَبَشِّرُهُ بِمَغْفِرَةٍ وَأَجْرٍ كَرِيمٍ (١١) إِنَّا نَحْنُ نُحْيِي الْمَوْتَى وَنَكْتُبُ مَا قَدَّمُوا
وَأَثَرَهُمْ وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ فِي إِمَامٍ مُّبِينٍ (١٢)

This is Sūrah Yāsīn. The Wise Qur’ān – bears witness that you are among the messengers, on an absolutely straight path – that has been revealed by the Mighty One, the Merciful so that you may inform a people whose predecessors had not been informed; thus they are heedless. On many of them Our words have come true; so they will not be among the believers. We have put yolks around their necks that reach up to their chins so that they cannot bow their heads. And We have put a barrier in front of them and a barrier behind them. In this manner, We have covered them so that they are not able to see. And it is the same whether or not you warn them: they will never accept faith. You can only warn those who pay heed to counsel and fear the Merciful, though they cannot see Him. So give glad tidings of pardon and a noble reward to such people. Indeed, We will resurrect the dead and We have recorded what they have sent forward and left behind. And We have noted down all things in a clear book. (1-12)

Explanation

يس (١)¹

These letters are from among the *muqatta‘āt hurūf*. They were comprehensively explained at the beginning of Sūrah Baqarah’s *tafsīr*. يسي is the Qur’ānic name of the *sūrah*. Some people think that it means: يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَان. However, this interpretation has absolutely no substantiation.

وَالْقُرْآنِ الْحَكِيمِ (٢) إِنَّكَ لَمِنَ الْمُرْسَلِينَ (٣)²

Here the letter وَ here signifies an oath. As explained by my mentor Imām Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī in his *Al-Im‘ān fī Aqsām al-Qur’ān* that in Arabic an oath itself signifies bearing witness. The verse thus means: “The Qur’ān replete with wisdom bears witness that you are from among the category of messengers.” No one except a messenger is able to produce such a wise and miraculous discourse. It is thus evident that the real miracle of the Qur’ān lies in its wisdom and philosophy. Its linguistic eloquence and articulacy is in addition.

1. This is Sūrah Yāsīn.

2. The Wise Qur’ān – bears witness that you are among the messengers.

عَلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ (٤)³

This is the second enunciative (*khavar*) after the first one. Its mention without a co-ordinating particle shows that the Qur'ān simultaneously bears witness to two things: Muhammad is among the messengers of God and that he is on the straight path and calling people to tread this straight path. The expression صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ is undefined to augment and amplify its purport. It is evident from this usage that the path towards which a person is guided by God and by his intellect and nature is very straight. Those who are evading this straight path have perverted their nature and have stopped using their intellect; for this reason, a straight path appears crooked to them.

تَنْزِيلَ الْعَزِيزِ الرَّحِيمِ (٥)⁴

The word تَنْزِيلَ is in the accusative from a suppressed verb. I have explained its meaning in detail at an appropriate place of this exegesis that it also means to reveal something gradually in a thorough and profound manner. The verse in fact directs the attention of the readers to another aspect of the Qur'ān: the powerful and merciful God has revealed it in thorough and profound way so that people should reflect on it and obtain guidance from it regarding the straight path. Here, two attributes of God are mentioned: الْعَزِيزِ (powerful) and الرَّحِيمِ (merciful). The first one is for warning and the second one for giving glad tidings. In other words, those who deny this Book should bear in mind that this Book is not the request of an implorer; it is the directive of a powerful and sovereign being that has to be followed at all cost; He will punish all the arrogant. At the same time, He is merciful as well and He has actually revealed this Book to show His mercy. So those of His people who duly value this Book will receive His unbounded mercy and blessings.

لَشَذِرَ قَوْمًا مَّا أُنذِرَ آبَاؤُهُمْ فَهُمْ غَافِلُونَ (٦)⁵

This verse alludes to the purpose of Qur'ānic revelation. The Almighty has revealed it in a profound and thorough manner because those to whom no prophet of God was sent before Muḥammad (sws) were living in heedlessness. Muḥammad (sws) is told to fully inform them of their

3. On an absolutely straight path.

4. – That has been revealed by the Mighty One, the Merciful.

5. So that you may inform a people whose predecessors had not been informed; thus they are heedless.

fate. Reference here is to the Ishmaelites and the verse actually states the great favour of the Almighty on the *ummiyyīn* in accordance with the invocation of Abraham (sws) and predictions made by the prophets of God. This verse besides sounding these glad tidings to them also warns them that if they do not duly value this favour, they will find this favour replaced with great devastation for them. At another place, this is stated in the following words: (٤٦:٢٨) لِّنُذِيرَ قَوْمًا مَّا أَتَاهُمْ مِّنْ نَّذِيرٍ مِّن قَبْلِكَ (so that you inform people to whom no warner had come before you, (28:46)).

لَقَدْ حَقَّ الْقَوْلُ عَلَى أَكْثَرِهِمْ فَهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ (٧)

The word قَوْل refers to the statement of God given by Him in response to Satan when he had threatened to lead the majority of progeny of Adam's (sws) progeny astray. At that time, God had said: لَا مَلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ (I shall fill Hell with all men and jinn who follow you, (32:13)). While referring to this statement of God, the Prophet (sws) has been assured that his responsibility is to warn people and he should keep doing it; however, he should not expect that every person to accept his message; there will be several on whom God's statement will come true that they will become the firewood Hell because of following Satan; such people will not accept faith; he should not go after such people or be worried about them.

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا فِي أَعْنَاقِهِمْ أَغْلَالًا فَهِيَ إِلَى الْأَذْقَانِ فَهُمْ مُّقْمَحُونَ (٨)

This is a portrayal of the arrogance of the people who were not accepting faith; it is as if yolks have been put around their necks which rise up till the chins. The result is that their heads are stuck upwards; they are neither able to bend down nor rise up. The result is that these people are neither able to see the signs found in this earth nor the ones found in the heavens. This state of theirs is ascribed by God to Himself: it is He Who has turned them into this state. The reason for this ascription is that the state of an individual or a group is according an established law of God: people who intentionally evade and deviate from the truth and lead their lives while shutting their eyes to God's signs are punished for this attitude. God makes their desires and evil deeds get the better of them and the result is that no reminder or teaching affects them.

6. On most of them Our words have come true; so they will not be among the believers.

7. We have put yolks around their necks that reach up to their chins so that they cannot bow their heads.

This very law is referred to in Sūrah Muṭaffifīn in the following words: (كَلَّا بَلْ رَانَ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ (83:14)) (Certainly not! In fact, the rust of their deeds has settled on their hearts) (83:14).

The word مُقَمَّحُ refers to a camel whose head is tied from behind in such a way that it is not able to bend its neck below a certain extent. Exactly same will be the case of a person around whose neck an iron yolk will be put. He too will not be able to bend his head or raise it; his neck will be fixed at a certain angle. This is a depiction of their arrogance, as indicated before. Such people remain unaware of all signs around them and those that lie above and below them and on their right and on their left. They are only aware of their over blown ego.

وَجَعَلْنَا مِنْ بَيْنِ أَيْدِيهِمْ سَدًّا وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ سَدًّا فَأَغْشَيْنَاهُمْ فَهُمْ لَا يُبْصِرُونَ (9)⁸

This verse is a further explanation of what is just said: God has placed barriers behind them and in front of them and has tied their eyes with a cloth so that they are not able to see anything. In Sūrah Sabā', wonder is expressed at this very state of theirs in the following words: أَفَلَمْ يَرَوْا إِلَى مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ (Have they not seen the heavens and the earth in front of them and behind them? (34:9)). It should also be borne in mind that such arrogant people are slave to their past traditions and future ambitions. Both these things become such a hindrance for them that they are not able to see anything besides them.

وَسَوَاءٌ عَلَيْهِمْ أَأَنذَرْتَهُمْ أَمْ لَمْ تُنذِرْهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ (10)⁹

Obviously, such people are afflicted with a severe intellectual and moral malady; hence, to warn them or to not warn them is absolutely useless with regard to the real objective; they never accept faith. If such people are warned it is only to conclusively communicate the truth to them so that they will not be able to present any excuse on the Day of Judgement. Readers are advised to look up the discussion on "sealing the heart" (*khatm al-qulūb*) found at the beginning of my exegesis of Sūrah Baqarah.

إِنَّمَا تُنذِرُ مَنِ اتَّبَعَ الذِّكْرَ وَخَشِيَ الرَّحْمَنَ الْغَيْبِ فَبَشِّرْهُ بِمَغْفِرَةٍ وَأَجْرٍ كَرِيمٍ (11)¹⁰

8. And We have put a barrier in front of them and a barrier behind them. In this manner, We have covered them so that they are not able to see.

9. And it is the same whether or not you warn them: they will never accept faith.

10. You can only warn those who pay heed to counsel and fear the Merciful,

The verse states that the Prophet's reminders and teachings will only affect those who hear his advice, reflect on it and open the doors of their hearts to it. Moreover, they would be ones who use their intellect and are not mere slaves of their senses so that until something is visually shown to them they are not ready to accept it. Only that faith is of value to God which is professed by using the faculties of sight, hearing, mind as well as the heart and not after visually observing the facts. The verse implies that the Prophet (sws) should consign the matter of people who want to accept faith after seeing everything to God; however, he should give glad tidings of a noble reward to those who fear God even though they have not seen Him.

I have pointed out at a number of places that fearing God is a consequence of His graciousness. Since He is the Most gracious, it is essential that He reward the pious for their virtue and punish the wrongdoers for their sins. For the manifestation of His graciousness, He has appointed a day for reward and punishment; on this day, His mercy and justice will manifest themselves in their perfect sense.

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ وَنَكْتُبُ مَا قَدَّمُوا وَآثَارَهُمْ وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ فِي إِمَامٍ مُّبِينٍ (١٢)¹¹

This verse is a reminder of the Day of Judgment entailed by His graciousness. It states that a day will come when God will raise to life all the dead and whatever they left behind in this world and whatever they did for the next world is being noted by Him. The purpose is to explain to them that when God is going to raise all the dead and is also noting down all their deeds, then this necessarily means that He will deal with each of them according to his or her deeds. This necessary consequence is not stated here. The first reason for this is that it is evident without its mention. The second reason is that the disbelievers doubted the Day of Judgement with regard to two aspects: firstly, they regarded being raised up to life again as improbable and secondly they reckoned that who can preserve the record of words and deeds of such a large number of people. Once these doubts were cleared, their necessary consequence became self-obvious.

The expression مَا قَدَّمُوا وَآثَارَهُمْ means precisely what is stated at another place as: يُنَبِّأُ الْإِنْسَانُ يَوْمَئِذٍ بِمَا قَدَّمَ وَأَخَّرَ (٧٥:١٣) (On that Day, man will be informed what he sent forth and what he left behind. (75:13)). In this

though they cannot see Him. So give glad tidings of pardon and a noble reward to such people.

11. Indeed, We will resurrect the dead and We have recorded what they have sent forward and left behind. And We have noted down all things in a clear book.

world, a person does several deeds for the Hereafter according to his own concept and there are many deeds he does for this world or for those who come after him. The verse says that both these types of deeds are being noted by God.

Consider next, the portion: **وَكُلُّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ فِي إِمَامٍ مُبِينٍ**. The actual meaning of the word **إِمَام** is “leader, guide and fountainhead.” From here this word came to be used for the Book which is a guide and fountainhead for everyone. Thus in verse 17 of Sūrah Hūd and verse 12 of Sūrah Aḥqāf, it is also used for the Torah. In the verse under discussion, it refers to the central register which records the deeds of all people according to which a person will be rewarded or punished. This portion is actually a further explanation of what is said earlier: no one should wrongly think that the Almighty has been careless in recording the words and deeds of people. This is not correct; in fact, everything has been recorded in a clear register. It will present the minutest of deeds and words of everyone.

Section II: Verses (13-32)

In the succeeding verses, an example of a city is cited before the Quraysh in order to explain to them the fate of those who deny messengers of God. The Almighty sent two of His messengers to warn the inhabitants of this city; however, they denied both of them. After that, the Almighty helped these two by a third warner; but the inhabitants of that city showed indifference to him. The signs that manifested themselves to warn them were regarded as bad-luck brought by the messengers and threatened to stone them. Finally, the Almighty sent a decisive punishment on them that totally routed them. The Qur’ān has not named the city. Hence the question arises which city is it referring to? Our exegetes are of the opinion that the reference is to Antioch and the messengers mentioned here are not the messengers of God; they are in fact envoys of Jesus (sws) who were selected by him from amongst his disciples to go to warn the people of Antioch. The Qur’ān commentaries I have at my disposal all state this. Though Ibn Kathīr has raised many questions on this view and thereby challenged its veracity yet ultimately he has also adopted this view since he was not able to find any other view in this regard. In my opinion, this view is baseless because of a number of reasons. They are:

1. The way these messengers are mentioned here and the capacity in which they presented themselves before people shows that they are not envoys of Jesus (sws); rather they are envoys of God. Thus for example,

it is said: (١٤:٣٦) إِذْ أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهِمُ اثْنَيْنِ فَكَذَّبُوهُمَا فَعَزَّزْنَا بِثَالِثٍ فَقَالُوا إِنَّا إِلَيْكُم مُّرْسَلُونَ (When We sent to them two messengers, but when they rejected both We strengthened them with a third. They said: “We have been sent to you as messengers,” (36:14)). Further it is said that when people rejected them by saying that they are human beings like them, they replied on oath thus: (١٦:٣٦) رَبَّنَا يَعْلَمُ إِنَّا إِلَيْكُم لَمُرْسَلُونَ (Our Lord bears witness that we have come to you as messengers, (36:16)). If these people were envoys of Jesus (sws), why has the Almighty so explicitly and categorically ascribed their sending to Himself? If they had invited and preached people in their own capacity, why would they reject them because of being human beings? If the addressees of a messenger rejected them because of being human beings, it was because they claimed to be messengers of God. The addressees would contend that if God had to send a messenger why would He choose human beings like them for this purpose? Why did He not choose His angels or some other superior creatures for this purpose?

2. If this incident took place during the time of Jesus (sws) and resulted in the destruction of Antioch, then it should have been mentioned in the Gospels and Bible history since it was a very prominent incident. However, neither the Gospels nor Bible history mention it. In fact, history bears witness to the contrary; it is reported that the people of Antioch took lead in professing faith in Jesus (sws).

3. This incident is mentioned before the Quraysh as an established historical incident. Hence the word is defined by the definite article ال. The expression أصحاب قرية is not used; on the contrary, the expression أصحاب القرية is used. Context and occasion also demand that some known incident be narrated because the purpose of narrating it is to warn the Quraysh. This objective can only be achieved if the referred to incident is a known and famous one not one of which they are not even aware of.

4. Jesus (sws) was a messenger sent to the Israelites. Hence, he neither invited other nations to his message nor sent his disciples to them. He in fact stopped his disciples from going to other nations. He is reported to have said: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” (Matthew, 15:24). For other nations, his words are: “First let the children eat all they want for it is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs,” (Mark, 7:27). Hence, the question arises as to whom in Antioch did he send his disciples? Obviously, he could not have sent them to other nations. As far as the Israelites are concerned, they did not reject Jesus (sws) on the ground that he was a human, so why would they reject his disciples on this ground? They regarded the prophets they

believed in to be humans; thus they could not have raised this question. Consequently, they raised all kinds of questions and worked all kinds of mischief against the propethood of Muḥammad (sws); yet they never objected that he was a human. On the contrary, when the Quraysh raised this objection, the Qur'ān presented the Israelites as evidence and told the Quraysh to ask them whether all the prophets and messengers sent by God were humans or not.

5. It is mentioned ahead that after rejecting these messengers, these people were visited by a decisive punishment that totally routed them. The words are: (إِنْ كَانَتْ إِلَّا صَيْحَةً وَاحِدَةً فَإِذَا هُمْ خَامِدُونَ (٢٦: ٢٩)) (It was just a shout so that they were routed instantaneously, (36:29)). I have stated several times in this exegesis that as per the established practice of God, such a decisive punishment is only sent by Him to people who deny His messengers even after the truth is conclusively communicated to them. Regarding the Jews, it should be kept in mind that no such punishment afflicted them as was afflicted to nations before them for denying their respective messengers; their punishment took the form of eternal curse from God till the Day of Judgement. This punishment is the sternest of all punishments as a result of which they will continue to live in humiliation and disgrace in this world, and more humiliation awaits them in the Hereafter. I have already explained this in the exegesis of Sūrah A'rāf and Sūrah Banī Isrā'īl.

The various aspects of weakness of this view are very clear. There are certain other aspects which will be discussed ahead in the explanation of the verses. In my opinion, the reference is to Egypt where the Pharaoh was divinely punished for denying Moses (sws), Aaron (sws) and a true believer. Arguments of this view will be presented ahead when the explanation of the verses is discussed.

Readers may now proceed to study the verses.

وَاضْرِبْ لَهُم مَّثَلًا أَصْحَابَ الْقَرْيَةِ إِذْ جَاءَهَا الْمُرْسَلُونَ (١٣) إِذْ أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهِمُ اثْنَيْنِ فَكَذَّبُوهُمَا فَعَزَّزْنَا بِثَالِثٍ فَقَالُوا إِنَّا إِلَيْكُم مُّرْسَلُونَ (١٤) قَالُوا مَا أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا بَشَرٌ مِثْلُنَا وَمَا أَنْزَلَ الرَّحْمَنُ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِنْ أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا تَكْذِبُونَ (١٥) قَالُوا رَبُّنَا يَعْلَمُ إِنَّا إِلَيْكُم لَمُرْسَلُونَ (١٦) وَمَا عَلَيْنَا إِلَّا الْبَلَاغُ الْمُبِينُ (١٧) قَالُوا إِنَّا تَطَيَّرْنَا بِكُمْ لَئِنْ لَمْ تَنْتَهُوا لَنَرْجُمَنَّكُمْ وَلَيَمَسَّنَّكُم مِّنَّا عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ (١٨) قَالُوا طَائِرُكُم مَّعَكُمْ أَئِنْ ذُكِّرْتُمْ بَلْ أَنْتُمْ قَوْمٌ مُّسْرِفُونَ (١٩) وَجَاء مِنْ أَقْصَى الْمَدِينَةِ رَجُلٌ يَسْعَى قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اتَّبِعُوا الْمُرْسَلِينَ (٢٠)

اتَّبِعُوا مَنْ لَا يَسْأَلُكُمْ أَجْرًا وَهُمْ مُهْتَدُونَ (٢١) وَمَا لِي لَا أَعْبُدُ الَّذِي فَطَرَنِي وَإِلَيْهِ
 تُرْجَعُونَ (٢٢) أَأَتَّخِذُ مِنْ دُونِهِ آلِهَةً إِنْ يُرِدْنِ الرَّحْمَنُ بِضُرٍّ لَا تُغْنِي عَنِّي شَفَاعَتُهُمْ شَيْئًا
 وَلَا يُنْقِذُونِ (٢٣) إِنِّي إِذَا لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ (٢٤) إِنِّي آمَنْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ فَاسْمِعُونِ (٢٥) قِيلَ
 ادْخُلِ الْجَنَّةَ قَالَ يَا لَيْتَ قَوْمِي يَعْلَمُونَ (٢٦) بِمَا غَفَرَ لِي رَبِّي وَجَعَلَنِي مِنَ الْمُكْرَمِينَ
 (٢٧) وَمَا أَنْزَلْنَا عَلَى قَوْمِهِ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ مِنْ جُندٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَمَا كُنَّا مُنْزِلِينَ (٢٨) إِنْ كَانَتْ
 إِلَّا صَيْحَةً وَاحِدَةً فِإِذَا هُمْ خَامِدُونَ (٢٩) يَا حَسْرَةً عَلَى الْعِبَادِ مَا يَأْتِيهِمْ مِّن رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا
 كَانُوا بِهِ يَسْتَهْزِئُونَ (٣٠) أَلَمْ يَرَوْا كَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا قَبْلَهُمْ مِّنَ الْقُرُونِ أَنَّهُمْ إِلَيْهِمْ لَا
 يَرْجِعُونَ (٣١) وَإِنْ كُلٌّ لَّمَّا جَمِيعٌ لَّدَيْنَا مُحْضَرُونَ (٣٢)

And recount to them the example of people of the city when the messengers came to them; when We sent to them two messengers; but they rejected both; then We strengthened them with a third. So they said to the people: "We have come to you as those sent." People replied: "You are but mortals like ourselves. And the Merciful has revealed nothing; your claim is absolutely false." (13-15)

They said: "Our Lord bears witness that we have come to you as messengers. And our duty is only to deliver clearly." People said: "We regard you to bring bad luck; if you do not desist we will stone you and inflict on you a painful sorrow." The messengers replied: "Your bad luck is with you. Do you regard this to be bad luck that you have been reminded? In fact, you yourselves are great transgressors." (16-19)

And a man came running from the far end of the city. He said: "My People! Follow the messengers. Follow those who ask no reward from you and are also rightly guided. And why should I not worship Him Who has created me and to Whom you shall all be returned? Should I worship other gods than Him? If the Merciful wants to afflict me with harm, neither their intercession will be of benefit to me, nor will they be able to save me. Indeed, I should then be in evident error. I believe in your Lord; so hear me." It was said: "Enter Paradise." He exclaimed: "Would that my people knew that my Lord forgave me and made me among the honourable." (20-27)

And after him, We did not send down any army from the heavens on his people nor were We the senders. It was just a shout so that they were routed instantaneously. Alas for My slaves! They only made fun of every messenger that came to them. Have they not reflected that there have been many nations before them whom We destroyed. Never shall they now return to them. Indeed, all of them shall be brought before Us. (28-32)

Explanation

وَاضْرِبْ لَهُم مَّثَلًا أَصْحَابَ الْقَرْيَةِ إِذْ جَاءَهَا الْمُرْسَلُونَ¹²(١٣)

The antecedent of the pronoun in لَهُم is the Quraysh. The definite article ال on الْقَرْيَةِ shows that the addressees were aware of it in their minds. Indications mentioned in subsequent verses show that it refers to Egypt whose anecdote has been mentioned in the Qur'ān in various styles so that the Quraysh can learn a lesson from it. They well knew the details of this. The words إِذْ جَاءَهَا الْمُرْسَلُونَ are meant to direct the attention of the addressees of this verse to the circumstances when the messengers were sent to them. The verse states that the Prophet (sws) should recount the anecdote of the people of the city before his addressees to inform them that they too will meet the fate met by these people of the city if they adopt their ways.

إِذْ أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهِمُ اثْنَيْنِ فَكَذَّبُوهُمَا فَعَزَّزْنَا بِثَالِثٍ فَقَالُوا إِنَّا إِلَيْكُمْ مُّرْسَلُونَ¹³(١٤)

This verse explains the previous one regarding the sending of the messengers. The Almighty initially sent two messengers to them but they rejected these messengers. The Almighty then helped these messengers with a third person whereby these messengers called on the people that they have come to them from God and that they should listen to what they say to them and obey it.

The word اِثْنَيْنِ obviously refers to Moses (sws) and Aaron (sws). In the history of prophethood, there is only once instance when two messengers were simultaneously sent by God to a people. The reasons for this elaborate arrangement have been discussed in the previous *sūrahs*. When the Pharaoh and his followers rejected them, the Almighty sent a third person to their aid.

Who was this third person? In my opinion, it refers to the true believer from among the followers of the Pharaoh whose heroics have been mentioned subsequently in this anecdote and also at other instances in the Qur'ān particularly in Sūrah Mu'min. It is evident from what this true believer did while fearlessly supporting and valiantly helping Moses (sws) that he occupies the same status among the followers of Moses (sws) as the one occupied by Abū Bakr (rta) among the followers of

12. And recount to them the example of people of the city when the messengers came to them.

13. When We sent to them two messengers; but they rejected both; then We strengthened them with a third. So they said to the people: "We have come to you as those sent."

Muḥammad (sws). Though he was not a messenger in the technical sense, yet he undertook a fearless effort to defend and support the messengers. Thus, it is evident from the very words of the Qur'ān that he is not mentioned in the capacity of a messenger; he is in fact mentioned as a special supporter of them.

The Qur'ān has introduced him in verse 20 ahead and has also referred to his last memorable speech that he delivered in support of Moses (sws).

Deliberation on this introduction and speech will substantiate my deduction.

Thus for example, he is introduced as: (وَجَاءَ مِنْ أَقْصَى الْمَدِينَةِ رَجُلٌ يَسْعَى (٣٦:٢٠)) (And a man came running from the far end of the city, (36:20)). In precisely the same words, he is introduced in Sūrah Qaṣaṣ: (وَجَاءَ رَجُلٌ مِّنْ أَقْصَى الْمَدِينَةِ يَسْعَى قَالَ يَا مُوسَى إِنَّ الْمَلَأَ يَأْتَمِرُونَ بِكَ لِيَقْتُلُوكَ فَاخْرُجْ إِنِّي لَكَ مِنَ النَّاصِحِينَ (٢٨:٢٠)) (A person came running from the far end of the city and said: Moses! The high ups of the government are discussing with one another that you be put to death; so go away from here; I am from among your well wishers. (28:20)). This incident took place when Moses (sws) had killed an Egyptian and government officials were conspiring to execute him. At that time, this true believer informed Moses (sws) of this conspiracy and asked him to go away to some place. After this, Moses (sws) migrated to Madyan.

One example of the help and support offered by this true believer is coming up in the succeeding verses. Besides this, the Qur'ān has referred to a number of his feats. It is evident from verse 40 of Sūrah Mu'min that he belonged to the royal family and was a great advocate of the truth. He had sympathy for Moses (sws) even before he was assigned prophethood. Thus, in the above cited verses of Sūrah Qaṣaṣ, it is evident that when he came to know that Moses' life was in danger, he was very perturbed and immediately ran to him to inform him of this danger. Similarly, after Moses (sws) made claim to prophethood when the Pharaoh and his courtiers decided to kill him, this true believer delivered a speech in the court of the Pharaoh in the presence of all his courtiers. This speech is cited by the Qur'ān in Sūrah Mu'min. Presented below is this speech in my own words. Its reading will reveal the status and position of this person and as well as the nature of his support and help which the Qur'ān has referred to here. The words below are based on verses 26-45 of Sūrah Mu'min:

The Pharaoh said to his courtiers: "Let me slay Moses; if he is truthful let him call his Lord. I fear that he might change your religion and spread anarchy in the country." Moses said: "I take

refuge with my Lord and your Lord from the evil of every arrogant person who does not believe in the Day of Reckoning.”

But a believer from the Pharaoh’s family who had till then hidden his faith, said: “Would you slay a man merely because he says: ‘my Lord is God?’ even though he has also brought to you very clear signs from your Lord. If his claim is false, then its evil consequences will afflict none but him. And if he is speaking the truth, a part at least of what he is threatening you with will visit you. God never lets him succeed who is a blatant liar and a transgressor. O People of My Nation! Today you are dominant in the land; but who will save us from the torment of God if it visits us tomorrow?”

The Pharaoh said: “I am giving my calculated opinion and remember that I am guiding you towards exactly the straight path.”

And he who had embraced faith said: “O People of My Nation! I fear the same punishment will befall you as what befell the previous nations – the people of Noah, the ‘Ād, and the Thamūd, and those who came after them. And God does not like to see His servants being oppressed.

O People of My Nation! I fear for you the Day of great upheaval – the day you will turn and flee and there will be none to save you from the wrath of God. Remember that he whom God leads astray shall have none to guide him. Before this, Joseph came to you with clear signs but you only kept doubting what he brought until when he died you thought that after him God will never send another messenger.” In this manner does God lead astray those who exceed bounds and are afflicted with doubts, ie those who dispute God’s revelations without any argument that has reached them are deeply hated by God and by the believers. In this manner does God seal the heart of every arrogant tyrant.

Pharaoh said: “O Hāmān! Build me a tower that I may peep in the edges of the heavens to see where the Lord of Moses is; I regard him to be a complete liar.”

.....

And he who had embraced faith said: “My people! Follow me; I am guiding you to the right path. My people! The life of this world is but a fleeting one; the real abode is the life to come. He who commits an

evil shall receive in exchange what is similar to it and he who does a good deed, whether man or woman, then it is such people who will enter Paradise where they will receive innumerable blessings.

And my people! What is the matter; I call you towards salvation and you call me to the Fire? You urge me to reject God and associate partners with Him of which I know nothing. And I call you to the Almighty, the Forgiving One – Indeed, the ones to whom you call me to neither have a say in this world nor in the next. And all of us have to return to God. And those who transgress bounds are the ones who shall be the firewood of Hell. Very soon you will understand the things I am telling you. I consign my matter to God.

Indeed, God is watching over His servants. Thus God delivered him from the evil conspiracies of the people and an evil punishment surrounded the Pharaoh's people.

This speech was delivered by the true believer to the House of Lords of Egypt before all the courtiers and nobles. It was delivered at the time when the Pharaoh had presented his suggestion to kill Moses (sws) and tried to convince his courtiers in its favour. Till that time he had hidden his faith. However, when this decisive moment arrived, he revealed his true identity. Then what he said in support of Moses (sws) before the Pharaoh and his nobles and the arguments he presented and the fearless nature in which he spoke has no parallel except in the history of prophets of God and the righteous. It should also be kept in mind that he was not an ordinary person; he was a noble of the royal family; hence his advice could not have been regarded to be one given in bias for the Israelites. These courtiers had indeed blamed Moses (sws) and Aaron (sws) for inciting rebellion among the Israelites; but how could they have disillusioned their masses about a voice of truth that had arisen from a person from their own selves. It is this shining feat and ever-famous exploit of this great person that is mentioned by Almighty in the words: *فَعَزَّزْنَا بِثَالِثٍ* (so We helped [them] with a third). He was obviously not a messenger in the technical sense the way Moses (sws) and Aaron (sws) were. Yet he was the most powerful, the most fearless, the most righteous and the most sincere companion of these two. That is why the Almighty has given him the position of the third of the three.

The words *فَقَالُوا إِنَّا إِلَيْنَاكُمْ مُرْسَلُونَ* spoken by all the three in the plural does not necessitate that all the three are messengers of the same status. This linguistic style is one in which the dominant element is implied. People who belong to the same embassy are not ambassadors of equal

status; yet since they share responsibilities, they can present themselves in this capacity before people. It should be kept in mind that only Moses (sws) was the real messenger. Aaron (sws) too was not the primary messenger; he was only a helping-messenger to Moses (sws). Similarly, this third person was not a messenger; he was the most courageous supporter of these messengers; however, he had taken upon himself the responsibility of preaching of Moses (sws); he was calling upon his nation to stop following evil leaders and to instead follow Moses (sws) and Aaron (sws) and himself. For this reason, the Almighty regarded him in this category of messengers.

قَالُوا مَا أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا بَشَرٌ مِّثْلُنَا وَمَا أَنْزَلَ الرَّحْمَنُ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا تَكْذِبُونَ (١٥)¹⁴

This is the same objection which rejecters of every messenger of God raised. They would say that these messengers are human beings like them; how can they be messengers of God; if God wanted to send a messenger He would have selected some superior creature for this purpose and not human beings like them. This objection is cited by the Qur'ān at numerous occasions from the tongue of the rejecters. The Pharaoh and his courtiers too raised this objection on Moses (sws), and it was this very objection which the Quraysh raised against Muḥammad (sws).

The words وَمَا أَنْزَلَ الرَّحْمَنُ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا تَكْذِبُونَ imply that the Prophet's claim that God has sent His revelation or Book to him is absolutely false; God has not sent revealed anything.

قَالُوا رَبُّنَا يَعْلَمُ إِنَّا إِلَيْكُمْ لَمُرْسَلُونَ (١٦) وَمَا عَلَيْنَا إِلَّا الْبَلَاغُ الْمُبِينُ (١٧)¹⁵

The words رَبُّنَا يَعْلَمُ signify an oath. I have explained this style at another instance. In response to the rejection of their respective followers, these messengers swore on oath that they have been sent by God. Just as in verse 14 the word مُرْسَلُونَ occurs with respect to the dominant element, here too it occurs similarly for the same reason.

The words وَمَا عَلَيْنَا إِلَّا الْبَلَاغُ الْمُبِينُ sound an admonition to their people: if they want to deny, they should keep denying; they said to them that the only responsibility they have from God is to present to them the word of God in a clear and distinct manner; they cannot force it down their

14. People replied: "You are but mortals like ourselves. And the Merciful has revealed nothing; your claim is absolutely false."

15. They said: "Our Lord bears witness that we have come to you as messengers. And our duty is only to deliver clearly."

throats. They further said to them that if they do not listen to what they say, they will suffer its consequences and they themselves would have fulfilled their obligation.

قَالُوا إِنَّا تَطَيَّرْنَا بِكُمْ لَئِن لَّمْ تَنْتَهُوا لَنَرْجُمَنَّكُمْ وَلَيَمَسَّنَّكُم مِّنَّا عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ (١٨)¹⁶

I have presented my research on the word تَطَيَّر at an appropriate place of this exegesis. Here it means to regard something as a bad omen and one that brings bad luck.

In other words, instead of learning a lesson from the calamities which struck the people of Egypt during the time these messengers preached there, they regarded them be bad omens from Moses (sws) and his followers. They contended that these calamities have not visited them because of their deeds as Moses (sws) and his companions were alleging; they have visited them because of the evil and erroneous message preached by him which has angered their deities. At the same time, these people threatened Moses (sws) and his companions that if they do not desist from this preaching of wrong beliefs they will stone them to death in order to protect their deities. Also, they will inflict even more harm on them. This topic is also discussed in Sūrah A‘rāf in the following words: وَلَقَدْ أَخَذْنَا آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ بِالسِّنِينَ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الثَّمَرَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَذَّكَّرُونَ فَإِذَا جَاءَتْهُمْ الْحَسَنَةُ قَالُوا لَنَا هَذِهِ وَإِنْ تُصِبْهُمْ سَيِّئَةٌ يَطَّيَّرُوا بِمُوسَى وَمَنْ مَّعَهُ (٧: ١٣٠-١٣١) (And indeed We inflicted the people of the Pharaoh drought and shortness of fruits that they may pay heed; so whenever their circumstances would be good, they said: “Only we have this right [over them].” And if any calamity struck them, they called it to be bad luck brought by Moses and his companions. (7:130-131))

قَالُوا طَائِرُكُم مَّعَكُمْ أَئِنْ ذُكِّرْتُمْ بَلْ أَنْتُمْ قَوْمٌ مُّسْرِفُونَ (١٩)¹⁷

Research on the word طَائِر has been presented at an appropriate place of this exegesis. Here it means “misfortune.” This is the reply given by the messengers: these people try to find the causes of the misfortune in others; the fact is that they themselves have wrecked their fortunes. Whatever is happening to them is the result of their own beliefs and deeds. Instead of calling others as criminals, they should do some soul-

16. People said: “We regard you to bring bad luck; if you do not desist we will stone you and inflict on you a painful sorrow.”

17. The messengers replied: “Your bad luck is with you. Do you regard this to be bad luck that you have been reminded? In fact, you yourselves are great transgressors.”

searching and evaluate their beliefs and deeds.

The words **أَيْنَ دُكِّرْتُمْ** mean that if they are calling these messengers as ones who have brought misfortune to them, then is it because of this sin that they have been reminded by these messengers and made aware of their good and evil.

The words **بَلْ أَنْتُمْ قَوْمٌ مُّسْرِفُونَ** imply that it is the height of their arrogance that by crossing the limits set by God they put themselves into danger; moreover, instead of thanking servants of God who inform them of this danger, they regard these very servants to be a cause of this danger.

وَجَاءَ مِنْ أَقْصَى الْمَدِينَةِ رَجُلٌ يَسْعَى قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اتَّبِعُوا الْمُرْسَلِينَ (٢٠) اتَّبِعُوا مَنْ لَا يَسْأَلُكُمْ أَجْرًا وَهُمْ مُّهْتَدُونَ (٢١)¹⁸

These verses explain the nature of help provided by the third warner mentioned earlier in verse fourteen. I have already explained earlier with reference to Sūrah A'rāf verse 9 that the word **رَجُلٌ** mentioned in the verse under discussion is the true believer who belonged to the Pharaoh's family and who has been referred to in detail in Sūrah Mu'min. Earlier, I have also referred to his speech. The obvious indication to this is that the words in which he is introduced here are the same in which he is introduced in Sūrah A'rāf.

It is evident from the words **وَجَاءَ مِنْ أَقْصَى الْمَدِينَةِ رَجُلٌ يَسْعَى** that the sympathy of the true believer was not mere pretension. It was genuine. Many people shower praises on a noble person and a noble objective in their drawing room talk; however, there are very few especially among the rich and the elite who show practical enthusiasm in this regard. However, the case of this true believer was very different. His house was situated at a far off end of the city, as is evident from the word **أَقْصَى**. However, as soon as he felt danger was lurking for Moses (sws) he ran to him, as is evident from the word **يَسْعَى**. He reached there and by risking his own interests and even his life became a shield for him. It is such an instance which the Qur'ān has cited here. It is contextually evident that this instance was the one in which he delivered the speech before the Pharaoh referred to earlier. The succeeding verses corroborate my view.

The words **قَالَ يَا قَوْمِ اتَّبِعُوا الْمُرْسَلِينَ** refer rather concisely to this speech he gave before the Pharaoh and his courtiers. The word **الْمُرْسَلِينَ** refers to the category of messengers. They do not necessitate that he considered

18. And a man came running from the far end of the city. He said: "My people! Follow the messengers. Follow those who ask no reward of you and are also rightly guided."

himself as well among them in the formal sense. The real stress here is that the nation instead of following the Pharaoh, Hāmān and Qārūn and other evil leaders should follow those whom God has sent to guide people or those who support them and are following them.

The verse *اَتَّبِعُوا مَنْ لَا يَسْأَلُكُمْ أَجْرًا وَهُمْ مُهْتَدُونَ* contains two reasons in favour of following the messengers. Firstly, they have no vested interest associated with their preaching; they are enduring all these sorrows purely to guide people; on the other hand, leaders who are opposing their preaching are merely deceiving people for their selfish motives. Secondly, these messengers are rightly guided (*وَهُمْ مُهْتَدُونَ*), besides being so pure in their motives. It is evident from this that being selfless does vouch for a person's sincere intentions; however, to be sincere in intention does not mean that a person is also rightly guided. Hence, besides a person's pure intention and selfless nature, it is also essential to see whether what he says is rational as well or not. If his message has both these features, then not following him is a great misfortune.

وَمَا لِي لَا أَعْبُدُ الَّذِي فَطَرَنِي وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ (٢٢) أَلَتَّخِذُ مِنْ دُونِهِ آلِهَةً إِنْ يُرِدْنِ الرَّحْمَنُ بِضُرٍّ لَا تُغْنِي عَنِّي شَفَاعَتُهُمْ شَيْئًا وَلَا يُنْقِذُونِ (٢٣) إِنِّي إِذَا لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ (٢٤) إِنِّي آمَنْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ فَاسْمَعُونِ (٢٥)¹⁹

The style of the above verses shows that the true believer uttered these words in response to the rebukes of the leaders. When he would have openly asked them to follow the messengers, the selfish leaders must have regarded him to be an enemy of their nation and of their ancestral religion. In reply to this, he must have said these words that why should he not worship the being who brought him into existence and towards whom all have to return. The direct address found in *وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ* (and towards Him shall you be returned) is to express anger. The implication is that one day everyone will be brought before the Lord worshipping whom they are so emphatically stopping him from; at that time, each person will be held accountable for this deeds.

The verse *أَلَتَّخِذُ مِنْ دُونِهِ آلِهَةً إِنْ يُرِدْنِ الرَّحْمَنُ بِضُرٍّ لَا تُغْنِي عَنِّي شَفَاعَتُهُمْ شَيْئًا وَلَا يُنْقِذُونِ* implies that how is it possible that he regard certain deities worthy

19. And why should I not worship Him Who has created me and to Whom you shall all be returned? Should I worship other gods than Him? If the Merciful wants to afflict me with harm, neither their intercession will be of benefit to me, nor will they be able to save me. Indeed, I should then be in evident error. I believe in your Lord; so hear me."

of worship when these deities are so helpless that neither can their intercession save him from God if He wants to harm him nor do they have the status and position to deliver him from any calamity.

The words *إِذَا لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ* imply that if he does this, then this will be regarded as an open deviation from the truth for which he has no excuse.

The verse is a decisive answer to shut up his people. They should listen up to the words of the messenger that he has professed faith in God. In other words, instead of wasting time to make him stray from the right path it is better that they too adopt the path which he has adopted and profess faith in the Lord he has professed faith in. This is because He is in fact their Lord as well; if they try to lead him away from God it will be like leading him away from their Lord.

قِيلَ ادْخُلِ الْجَنَّةَ قَالَ يَا لَيْتَ قَوْمِي يَعْلَمُونَ (٢٦) بِمَا غَفَر لِي رَبِّي وَجَعَلَنِي مِنَ الْمُكْرَمِينَ (٢٧)²⁰

After the above mentioned proclamation by the true believer from the royal family, it is obvious that the whole nation would have become his enemy and started to conspire against him. However, God saved him from their conspiracies and he was given glad tidings of Paradise as a result of his vehement campaign to support the truth. At this, he expressed his longing that would that his people knew the exalted nature of that in reward of which he was forgiven and bestowed with success.

Here it is not known when these glad tidings were given to him.

If one reflects on the context, three options are possible:

Firstly, after this declaration made by him his people would have martyred him and at that instance he was given these glad tidings.

Secondly, after losing hope in the attitude shown by his people, he migrated from them and at that instance he was given these glad tidings.

Thirdly, since his mission had been completed God gave him death and at that instance he was given these glad tidings.

The first of these options though seems very probable if the context is taken into consideration. However, it is evident from the closing remarks of his speech cited above (with reference to Sūrah Mu'min) that God protected him from the conspiracies of his nation. After these closing remarks, his protection is mentioned thus:

فَسَتَذْكُرُونَ مَا أَقُولُ لَكُمْ وَأَفَوتُ أَمرِي إِلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بَصِيرٌ بِالْعِبَادِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بَصِيرٌ
بِالْعِبَادِ فَوَقَاهُ اللَّهُ سَيِّئَاتٍ مَا مَكَرُوا وَحَاقَ بِآلِ فِرْعَوْنَ سُوءُ الْعَذَابِ (٤٠: ٤٤-٤٥)

20. It was said: "Enter Paradise." He exclaimed: "Would that my people knew that my Lord forgiven me and has made me among the honourable."

[O My People!] Soon you will recall the things I am telling you. I consign my matter to God. Indeed, He is watching the affairs of His servants. Thus God delivered him from the evil consequences of their ploys and My punishment surrounded the Pharaoh's people. (40:44-45)

In the light of these verses, the option that he was killed is ruled out. However, both the first and the second option remain and it is difficult to decide between them. Only God knows it. The only thing that can be said with certainty is that God gave him glad tidings of Paradise for endangering his life to support the truth.

وَمَا أَنزَلْنَا عَلَى قَوْمِهِ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ مِنْ جُنْدٍ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَمَا كُنَّا مُنْزِلِينَ (٢٨) إِنْ كَانَتْ إِلَّا صَيْحَةً وَاحِدَةً فَإِذَا هُمْ خَامِدُونَ (٢٩)²¹

The words مِنْ بَعْدِهِ can be spoken for both the options referred to above: ie. after his death or after his migration.

This is a reference to the established practice of God which the rejecters of a messenger necessarily face when the messenger and his companions migrate from their nation. The verse states that after that to decimate his nation, God did not need to send down any army from the heavens; it was just one blast from God that devastated them. The word صَيْحَةً signifies punishment. The words وَمَا كُنَّا مُنْزِلِينَ express the fact that no army from the heavens was needed to destroy them because for such a task no such arrangement is need by God; just one blast is enough from Him.

It should also be kept in mind that though this punishment visited the Pharaoh and his people for denying Moses (sws) and Aaron (sws) it has been mentioned here as if it came because of denying the true believer. This expresses the exaltedness of the companions of a messenger in the eyes of God because denying them becomes tantamount to denying the messenger and the fate of this denial is the same as that of the denial of the messenger.

A possible question that can arise here is that the punishment which visited the rejecters of Moses (sws) ie. Pharaoh and his people was that he and his armies were drowned; however, the punishment mentioned in this verse does not refer to this incident of drowning; in fact, the words show that the nature of punishment was of the same sort as the one which visited the 'Ād, the Thamūd and other ancient nations and which

21. And after him, We did not send down any army from the heavens on his people nor were We the senders. It was just a shout so that they were routed instantaneously.

has been referred to by the true believer in his speech cited earlier with reference to Sūrah Mu'min.

The answer to this question is that two types of punishments struck the Pharaoh and his people. On the one hand, the Almighty had him and his armies drowned in the sea through cyclones. On the other hand, thunder, lightning and earthquakes destroyed all the buildings and orchards of Egypt. This second punishment is not mentioned in the Torah. However, it is explicitly mentioned by the Qur'ān. Thus, for example, it says:

وَدَمَّرْنَا مَا كَانَ يَصْنَعُ فِرْعَوْنُ وَقَوْمُهُ وَمَا كَانُوا يَصْرِفُونَ (٧: ١٣٧)

And we destroyed everything which the Pharaoh and his people had made and their vine-creepers. (7:137)

This is in accordance with the established practice of God as well. The punishment which inflicts a people who have denied their messenger totally routs them. This could not have been fulfilled merely by the Pharaoh and his armies being drowned. This could only have been fulfilled by the type of punishment referred to in the above cited verse of Sūrah A'rāf.

يَا حَسْرَةً عَلَى الْعِبَادِ مَا يَأْتِيهِمْ مِّن رَّسُولٍ إِلَّا كَانُوا بِهِ يَسْتَهْزِئُونَ (٣٠)

This is an expression of sorrow on the misfortune of the rejecters of the messengers of God: every time God sent a messenger for the guidance of people they made fun of him and then faced the evil consequences of this attitude. Thus, today the Quraysh are adopting the same attitude with their messenger and his companions as the one adopted by the Pharaoh and his people with their messenger and they shall necessarily be subjected to the same fate as their predecessors. A messenger comes as the greatest manifestation of God's mercy. However, if he is made fun of, he becomes the greatest scourge for his people.

أَلَمْ يَرَوْا كَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا قَبْلَهُم مِّنَ الْقُرُونِ أَنَّهُمْ إِلَيْهِمْ لَا يَرْجِعُونَ (٣١) وَإِنْ كُلُّ لَمَّا جَمِيعٌ لَّدَيْنَا مُحْضَرُونَ (٣٢) ²³

This verse directs the attention of the Quraysh to the past in order to

22. Alas for My slaves! They only made fun of every messenger that came to them.

23. Have they not reflected that there have been many nations before them whom We destroyed. Never shall they now return to them. Indeed, all of them shall be brought before Us.

show them what happens to those who make fun of the messengers of God. The web of deception they are weaving is very dangerous. Nations who indulge in this are routed to such an extent in this world that they can never return. All of them are going to appear before God one day Who will hold them accountable for their deeds.

The word *لَمَّا* in *وَإِنْ كُلُّ لَمَّا* is used in the same way as in the verse: *إِنْ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ لَمَّا عَلَيْهَا حَافِظٌ* (indeed, every every soul has a guardian over it, (86:4)). The *إِنْ* is reduced (*mukhaffafah*) as is evidenced by the letter *ل*. Since a rhythmic vacuum is created by pronouncing it alone, it is transformed into *لَمَّا* to fill this vacuum. No difference in meaning results.

Section III: Verses (33-50)

In the succeeding verses, the warning sounded by a messenger and the message towards he invites his addressees is corroborated by signs found in the world around man. People who shut their eyes to all these signs and demand a new one are reprimanded. In other words, after the historical evidence mentioned earlier from here on the discourse connects to the introduction of the *sūrah* in which it was said that their real malady which is arrogance is not letting them look towards the signs found above and below them otherwise there are numerous signs around them. After this attitude of theirs and its fate was delineated through the example of the Pharaoh's people now again their attention is directed at the signs found in the heavens and the earth.

Readers may now proceed to study these verses.

وَآيَةٌ لَهُمُ الْأَرْضُ الْمَيْتَةُ أَحْيَيْنَاهَا وَأَخْرَجْنَا مِنْهَا حَبًّا فَمِنْهُ يَأْكُلُونَ (٣٣) وَجَعَلْنَا فِيهَا جَنَّاتٍ مِنْ نَخِيلٍ وَأَعْنَابٍ وَفَجَّرْنَا فِيهَا مِنَ الْعُيُونِ (٣٤) لِيَأْكُلُوا مِنْ ثَمَرِهِ وَمَا عَمِلَتْهُ أَيْدِيهِمْ أَفَلَا يَشْكُرُونَ (٣٥) سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْأَزْوَاجَ كُلَّهَا مِمَّا تُنْبِتُ الْأَرْضُ وَمِنْ أَنْفُسِهِمْ وَمِمَّا لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (٣٦) وَآيَةٌ لَهُمُ اللَّيْلُ نَسْلَخُ مِنْهُ النَّهَارَ فَإِذَا هُمْ مُظْلِمُونَ (٣٧) وَالشَّمْسُ تَجْرِي لِمُسْتَقَرٍّ لَهَا ذَلِكَ تَقْدِيرُ الْعَزِيزِ الْعَلِيمِ (٣٨) وَالْقَمَرَ قَدَرْنَا مَنَازِلَ حَتَّىٰ عَادَ كَالْعُرْجُونِ الْقَدِيمِ (٣٩) لَا الشَّمْسُ يَنْبَغِي لَهَا أَنْ تُدْرِكَ الْقَمَرَ وَلَا اللَّيْلُ سَابِقُ النَّهَارِ وَكُلٌّ فِي فَلَكٍ يَسْبَحُونَ (٤٠) وَآيَةٌ لَهُمْ أَنَّا حَمَلْنَا ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ فِي الْفُلِكِ الْمَشْحُونِ (٤١) وَخَلَقْنَا لَهُمْ مِنْ مِثْلِهِ مَا يَرْكَبُونَ (٤٢) وَإِنْ نَشَأْ نُغْرِقْهُمْ فَلَا صَرِيحَ لَهُمْ وَلَا هُمْ يُنْقَذُونَ (٤٣) إِلَّا رَحْمَةً مِنَّا وَمَتَاعًا إِلَىٰ حِينٍ (٤٤) وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ اتَّقُوا مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَمَا خَلْفَكُمْ

لَعَلَّكُمْ تَرْحَمُونَ (٤٥) وَمَا تَأْتِيهِمْ مِّنْ آيَةٍ مِّنْ آيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ إِلَّا كَانُوا عَنْهَا مُعْرِضِينَ (٤٦)
وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ أَنْفِقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقَكُمُ اللَّهُ قَالِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْطَعِمُ مَنْ لَوْ يَشَاءُ
اللَّهُ أَطْعَمَهُ إِنْ أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ (٤٧) وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَى هَذَا الْوَعْدُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ
(٤٨) مَا يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا صَيْحَةً وَاحِدَةً تَأْخُذُهُمْ وَهُمْ يَخِصِّمُونَ (٤٩) فَلَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ تَوْصِيَةً
وَلَا إِلَى أَهْلِهِمْ يَرْجِعُونَ (٥٠)

And a great sign for them is the dead earth. We gave it life, and from it produced grain; then they eat from it. And We planted it with orchards of the palm and the vine tree, and produced gushing springs in it so that they may eat its fruit. And this is not the work of their hands. So do they not show gratitude? (33-35)

Glory be to Him who created all types of those things also which the earth produces and also from among themselves and also things which they know not. (36)

And a great sign for them is the night. We pull the day from it and all of a sudden they are left in darkness and the sun moves according to its prescribed course. This is the planning of God, the Mighty One, the All-knowing. And for the moon we have ordained phases till it becomes like an old twig of a palm-tree. Neither can the sun dare overtake the moon nor can the night overtake the day. Each moves in its specific orbit. (37-40)

And a great sign for them is that We loaded their generation on a laden ark, and for them created similar things [in the land] on which they embark. And if We want, We can have them drowned; then neither will there be anyone to help them nor will they be rescued. Thus, it is only Our mercy and to let them live for a specified time. (41-44)

And when they are told: "Have fear of that which is before you and behind you so that you may be shown mercy," [they show indifference to this.] And which ever sign from the signs of their Lord comes to them they show indifference to it. And when they are told: "Spend of the sustenance God has blessed you with," the disbelievers say to the believers: "Are we to feed those whom God could have fed had He chosen to? Surely, you are in glaring error." (45-47)

And they ask: "When will this threat materialize if you are a truthful people." These people are only waiting but for a single shout which will grab them and they be left quarrelling. Hence, they will neither be able to make a will nor will they be able to return to their folks. (48-50)

Explanation

وَايَةٌ لَهُمُ الْأَرْضُ الْمَيْتَةُ أَحْيَيْنَاهَا وَأَخْرَجْنَا مِنْهَا حَبًّا فَمِنْهُ يَأْكُلُونَ (٣٣) وَجَعَلْنَا فِيهَا

جَنَاتٍ مِّنْ نَّخِيلٍ وَأَعْنَابٍ وَفَجَّرْنَا فِيهَا مِنَ الْعُيُونِ (٣٤) لِيَأْكُلُوا مِنْ ثَمَرِهِ وَمَا عَمِلَتْهُ أَيْدِيهِمْ أَفَلَا يَشْكُرُونَ (٣٥)²⁴

In these verses, attention is foremost directed to the signs found in the earth. Details can be seen in earlier *sūrahs* how various testimonies are drawn from enlivening a dead piece of land on the Hereafter, monotheism and revelation of divine guidance. Here, the aspect of providence is specially highlighted and after that the right to show gratitude to God is asked for which is necessarily imposed on people. The necessary consequence of this right is that people worship God alone. This is because the favours they have been blessed with are neither the result of their own endeavours nor any other being is responsible to give them these favours.

The words *وَأَيَّةٌ لَهُمُ الْأَرْضُ الْمَيْتَةُ* in *آيَةٌ* is not defined to show its great magnitude. The implication is that if these people need a sign, they need not go far. The greatest sign for them is the earth beneath their feet. At times, a land is dead and desolate; God enlivens it by sending rain to it and then causes grain to grow from it. On these grains depends the livelihood of people. If people reflect, they will see that it is not merely grains which have been arranged for their livelihood, He has also caused date-palms and vine-trees and other fruit orchards to grow and has made springs to keep them green.

The words *لِيَأْكُلُوا مِنْ ثَمَرِهِ وَمَا عَمِلَتْهُ أَيْدِيهِمْ أَفَلَا يَشْكُرُونَ* state the obligation imposed on man because of all this elaborate arrangement: it has been done so that people benefit from God's favours and pay heed that all this is not the result of their own effort; it is a bestowal from a merciful and noble Lord. He gave them these favours without even being entitled to them so that they show gratitude and obedience to Him. However, they are proving such ingrates that on the one hand they are benefitting from all these favours and on the other hand when they are called upon to express gratitude before God they show arrogance and demand signs.

There is a difference of opinion in the antecedent of the pronoun in *ثَمَرِهِ*. Most people regard it to be God, ie. people should eat the fruits bestowed to them by God and be grateful to Him). I find this interpretation to be artificial. The style of the discourse since the preceding verses is in the first person. Hence, giving due consideration to

24. A great sign for them is the dead earth. We gave it life, and from it produced grain; thus they eat from it. And We planted it with orchards of the palm and the vine tree, and produced gushing springs in it so that they may eat its fruit. And this is not a produce of their hands. So do they not show gratitude?

this fact, if God was to be the antecedent of the pronoun then the words should have been *مِنْ أَثْمَارِهَا* or words to similar effect instead of *مِنْ ثَمَرِهَا* – even though this too would not have been entirely appropriate. In my opinion, the antecedent of the pronoun is *أَرْض* (earth) that is already in mention since the preceding verses. However, [in spite of the fact that *أَرْض* is a feminine noun in Arabic] here a masculine pronoun is used to refer to it on the principle of dominant element (*‘alā sabīl al-taghlīb*). According to a principle of the Arabic language, at times a pronoun occurs not with relation to the word but to the meaning it conveys. Several examples of this can be seen in the previous *sūrahs*. By using the masculine pronoun for *أَرْض* the purpose is to refer to *الْبَلَدُ الطَّيِّبُ*. This is because though rain not only irrigates dry and barren areas and those which are lush and fertile, only the latter bear vegetation. This topic is discussed in Sūrah A‘rāf in the following words: *وَالْبَلَدُ الطَّيِّبُ يَخْرِجُ نَبَاتُهُ بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِ وَالَّذِي خَبُثَ لَا يَخْرُجُ إِلَّا نَكِدًا (٥٨: ٧)* (And the land which is fertile its vegetation really blooms with the directive of its Lord; and that which is defective always produce defective things.(7:58))

The words *وَمَا عَمِلْتُمْ أَبْدِيهِمْ* form a parenthetical sentence, and convey a very important reminder. The implication is that they should consume the fruits but always remember that they were not the ones who brought these fruits into existence; it was God Who did so. It is a reminder of this reality that induces a person to show gratitude to God and it is this gratitude which is the foundation of all religion. Those who are unaware of this reality think that they are entitled to God’s favours and that they are a result of their own abilities. The result is that instead of thanking God they are afflicted with arrogance and arrogance by its nature is a cause of polytheism and all forms of spreading anarchy and disorder in the society.

سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْأَزْوَاجَ كُلَّهَا مِمَّا تُنْبِتُ الْأَرْضُ وَمِنْ أَنْفُسِهِمْ وَمِمَّا لَا يَعْلَمُونَ (٣٦)²⁵

The word *أَزْوَاج* means “types”, “kinds” and also means “pairs”. Here it encompasses both meanings. There is variety and diversity in whatever is created from the earth and everything that is created from it also occurs in pairs. Similarly, one can see a lot of difference in the appearances, colours, statures and languages of human beings; at the same time, human beings too occur in pairs. Same is the case with that part of the universe which is beyond the access of our knowledge. If one

25. Glory be to Him who created all types of those also which the earth produces and from among themselves and also things which they know not.

takes a step ahead and reflects, one will come to see that there is a harmony of objective in its variety and accord in its discord. This shows that only one God reigns over all the universe; no one else can interfere in it. Exalted is God from any trace of polytheism, and every object of this universe bears witness to this.

Moreover, another thing that becomes evident is that when every thing occurs in pairs to achieve its purpose, it is necessary that this world should also have its counterpart; otherwise, this world will be a purposeless place. And it is not possible that a wise being do something purposeless and meaningless. Thus to fill the vacuum created by this world, He has created the next world.

The purport of the verse is that this universe through its very existence bears witness to monotheism and the Hereafter and that exalted is the Creator of this universe from doing something purposeless. The word *سُبْحَانَ* occurs to absolve someone of all negative attributes. Here its occasion and context are very evident.

وَأَيَّةٌ لَهُمُ اللَّيْلُ نَسْلَخُ مِنْهُ النَّهَارَ فَإِذَا هُمْ مُظْلِمُونَ (٣٧)²⁶

The verse says that if these people reflect they will find that the night is a great sign of God's power, mercy, providence and monotheism. He enwraps it with a cloth of light and the dazzling day appears for them. They can now do their daily chores in it. Then God pulls away this cloth of light and people are left in darkness so that they can take rest in it. If God does not enwrap the night with the cloth of light, they will always remain in darkness and if He does not pull away this cloth of light, they will never be able to receive rest and comfort at night. This coming and going of the day and night and their harmony for the benefit of the creation is a clear testimony to the fact that this world is not a battleground of conflicting elements; it is in fact made by a Creator Who is using all these conflicting elements for its collective benefit.

وَالشَّمْسُ تَجْرِي لِمُسْتَقَرٍّ لَهَا ذَلِكَ تَقْدِيرُ الْعَزِيزِ الْعَلِيمِ (٣٨)²⁷

Attention is now directed to the greatest sign of the day: the sun. They should observe the sun and see that it very punctually moves along its prescribed path; it dare not deviate from this path or there lapses even a second in its punctuality. Does this bear witness to the fact that whatever

26. A great sign for them is the night. We it We pull the day and all of a sudden they are left in darkness

27. And the sun revolves according to its prescribed course. This is the planning of God, the Mighty One, the All-knowing.

is going on in this world is going on of its own accord; there is no wise and well-planned effort behind it? Or is this not evidence enough to the fact that behind this is a powerful, all-knowledgeable and wise being in whose hands is the reins of everything and who is putting to use everything in accordance with his plan and strategy? The right answer to this question in harmony with sense and reason is: **ذَلِكَ تَقْدِيرُ الْعَزِيزِ الْعَلِيمِ** (This is the planning of God, the Mighty One, the All-knowing). In other words, neither has this world come into existence accidentally nor is it being run of its own accord. It is, in fact, the product of the planning of a being who is all-powerful, all-dominant and all-knowledgeable.

²⁸ **وَالْقَمَرَ قَدَرْنَاهُ مَنَازِلَ حَتَّىٰ عَادَ كَالْعُرْجُونِ الْقَدِيمِ (٣٩)**

This verse says that similar is the situation with the second big sign of this universe: the moon. It neither controls nor governs itself. God has ordained various phases through which it passes every month. After passing through these phases it ultimately becomes like an old twig of a palm-tree.

The word **عُرْجُون** refers to that branch of a palm-tree in which there are bunches of dates. These branches after drying up assume the same shape as the one a moon has in its initial and final phases. This comparison is pointing to the fact that the state of the moon whom these foolish people worship is that it has to pass through various phases each month in which it becomes like a dry thorn and becomes like a crooked dry twig of a palm-tree.

²⁹ **لَا الشَّمْسُ يَنْبَغِي لَهَا أَنْ تُدْرِكَ الْقَمَرَ وَلَا اللَّيْلُ سَابِقُ النَّهَارِ وَكُلٌّ فِي فَلَكٍ يَسْبَحُونَ (٤٠)**

This verse implies that the whole system of this universe is in the hands of the Creator of this universe in such a manner that neither the sun can dare deviate from its prescribed path and enter the path of the moon and catch upon it nor can the night dare come late after the day even by a second. Each of these objects has to move in its prescribed path. This is a very clear evidence of the fact that the reins of everything are in the hands of the all-powerful and almighty God and He alone is the master of everything and He alone has authority of everything. Had there been someone else with Him involved in administering this

28. And for the moon we have ordained phases till it becomes like an old twig of a palm-tree.

29. Neither can the sun dare overtake the moon nor can the night overtake the day. Each moves in its specific orbit.

universe, it would have been destroyed because of a clash between its conflicting elements. What is very evident in particular is that the more prominent an object is and as a result of this very prominence people regard it to be a deity and worship it, the more it declares from its very existence that it is subject to authority the most; it cannot dare deviate from its prescribed path in the slightest way.

وَايَةً لَهُمْ أَنَّا حَمَلْنَا ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ فِي الْفُلِّ الْمَشْحُونِ (٤١) وَخَلَقْنَا لَهُمْ مِنْ مِثْلِهِ مَا يَرْكَبُونَ (٤٢)
وَإِنْ نَشَاءُ نُغْرِقْهُمْ فَلَا صَرِيحَ لَهُمْ وَلَا هُمْ يُنْقَذُونَ (٤٣) إِلَّا رَحْمَةً مِنَّا وَمَتَاعًا إِلَىٰ حِينٍ (٤٤)³⁰

The pronoun هُمْ (they) in ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ refers to the addressees in their capacity of human beings and the word ذُرِّيَّةٌ refers to “a generation.” The word مَشْحُونٌ is used for a laden ship. The verses state that if they need a further sign they should observe that God for the sea travel of generations of mankind has made sea water capable of lifting ships laden with thousands of tons of goods and they do not drown in it.

The verse وَخَلَقْنَا لَهُمْ مِنْ مِثْلِهِ مَا يَرْكَبُونَ implies that just as God has made ships for sea-travel He had made similar means of transport for land-travel. These include horses and camels. In particular, the camel was regarded by the Arabs as the ship of the desert. Included in the application of this verse are other means of transport as well which technology has invented today like cars, lorries, buses and airplanes etc. The laws of science which govern the working of these things have been made and taught by God. It is by taking advantage of these laws that man makes various inventions and benefits from them. Hence, it is because of this real cause of causes that God has ascribed the making of these things to Himself.

Consider next the verse: وَإِنْ نَشَاءُ نُغْرِقْهُمْ فَلَا صَرِيحَ لَهُمْ وَلَا هُمْ يُنْقَذُونَ. The word صَرِيحٌ means “to plead” and “to answer pleadings” as well as “one who pleads” and “one who answers pleadings.” Here all these meanings are appropriate. The verse implies that it is God’s mercy that their ships laden with goods and merchandise run about on sea waters; If He wants, He can have these ships drown together with them. At that time, neither will they be able to plead nor will there be someone to respond to their pleadings nor will they be able to come out of this state of ruin and

30. And a great sign for them is that We loaded their generation on the laden ark, and for them created similar things [in the land] on which they embark. And if We want, We can have them drowned; then neither will there be anyone to help them nor will they be rescued. Thus, it is only Our mercy and to let them live for a while.

destruction.

The words *إِلَّا رَحْمَةً مِّنَّا وَمَتَاعًا إِلَىٰ حِينٍ* imply that whatever favours man has is neither a legacy of his forefathers nor the result of his power and ability; it is merely the result of God's graciousness. He has been given these blessings and favours till an appointed time. A time is finally to come when God will hold him accountable for these favours and see if they have shown gratitude to them and fulfilled their obligation towards these favours.

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمُ اتَّقُوا مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَمَا خَلْفَكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ (٤٥)³¹

The verse implies that when these people are warned to have fear of the heavens and the earth in front of them and behind them so that they are thrusted with the earth and pieces are thrown down on them from the heavens, then instead of paying heed they show evasion and demand a sign for punishment. The answer to the conditional particle *إِذَا* is suppressed here because of obvious contextual indications and the words *مَّا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَمَا خَلْفَكُمْ* are also suppressed after *مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ*. In Sūrah Sabā', the words are: *أَفَلَمْ يَرَوْا إِلَىٰ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ* (Do they no reflect on the heavens and the earth in front of them and behind them? If We want We can sink them with the earth or shower on them pieces from the heavens, (35:9)).

وَمَا تَأْتِيهِمْ مِّنْ آيَةٍ مِّنْ آيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ إِلَّا كَانُوا عَنْهَا مُعْرِضِينَ (٤٦)³²

The verse implies that this evasion and rejection has got the better of them so much that whatever sign comes to them from God to teach and remind them is no avail to them. Nothing is able to influence them.

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ أَنْفِقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقَكُمُ اللَّهُ قَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْطَعِمُ مَنْ لَوْ يَشَاءُ اللَّهُ أَطْعَمَهُ إِنْ أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ (٤٧)³³

This verse states an example of their callous and indifferent behaviour

31. And when they are told: "Have fear of that which is before you and behind you so that you may be shown mercy."

32. [They show indifference to this.] And which ever sign from the signs of their Lord comes to them they show indifference to it.

33. And when they are told: "Spend of the sustenance God has blessed you with," the disbelievers say to the believers: "Are we to feed those whom God could have fed had He chosen to? Surely, you are in glaring error."

referred to earlier: when they are invited to express gratitude to God as is cited in verse thirty five earlier, they make fun of it. Thus when they are asked to spend in charity and help the needy from the riches and blessings bestowed to them by God because this is an obligation they owe to these favours, they reply that why should they spend on those whom God has deprived; those who ask them to do this have strayed in error; had God wanted to feed and help them, He was not short of any means to do so; but since He chose not to do this, it clearly means that He wanted to make them poor; so if God willed all of this for them, and they spend on these people then this will not please God and they will earn His anger. After citing this absurd reasoning on their part, no comment is made by the Qur'ān. It has completely ignored it because its foolishness and callousness so evident that no comment is required. The purpose is to show that when hearts and intellects get perverted, then this is what people become like.

وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَى هَذَا الْوَعْدُ إِن كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ (٤٨) مَا يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا صَيْحَةً وَاحِدَةً تَأْخُذُهُمْ
وَهُمْ يَخِصِّمُونَ (٤٩) فَلَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ تَوْصِيَةً وَلَا إِلَى أَهْلِهِمْ يَرْجِعُونَ (٥٠)³⁴

These verses imply that when these people do not pay heed to the verses of God and only continue to perpetually demand to see the punishment with which they are being threatened. Without this they are not willing to regard those who give this news to be truthful.

Consider next the verse: مَا يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا صَيْحَةً وَاحِدَةً تَأْخُذُهُمْ وَهُمْ يَخِصِّمُونَ. The word صَيْحَةً has already occurred in verse twenty nine earlier. It is stated that on what support are they arrogantly demanding the punishment. God does not need to make any arrangements for it; only a single blast from Him will be sufficient; whilst they are entangled in these discussions, it will catch them unaware. The implication is that if the punishment is not coming, it does not mean that no preparation has been made; actually no preparation is needed at all. It is only because God out of His mercy is giving them further respite.

The words فَلَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ تَوْصِيَةً وَلَا إِلَى أَهْلِهِمْ يَرْجِعُونَ imply that that a single blast from God will be such that everyone will be seized by it wherever they are; he will not even get the chance to make a will or return to his family.

34. And they ask: "When will this threat materialize if you are a truthful people." These people are only waiting but for a single shout, which will grab and they be left quarrelling. Hence, they will neither be able to make a will nor will they return to their folks.

Section IV: Verses (51-68)

In the succeeding verses it is said that just as a single blast from God is needed to bring the punishment in this world, similarly when God wants to bring about the Day of Judgement no preparation will be needed. At the sound of the trumpet everyone will be raised to life.

After this occurs a portrayal of the Day of Judgement: the believers will be engrossed in their interests on that day, and the disbelievers will face the consequence of their deeds. On that day, no one will be allowed to speak; in fact, his own limbs will testify against each person.

After this a threat is sounded: if these people are stubbornly demanding punishment, they should remember that this is not at all difficult for God. If God wants He can distort and mutilate them so that they are deprived of all their abilities in the blink of an eye. They can see the signs of this in this world if they have eyes; if God has not effaced them, it is not because this task is difficult for them; it is only because of His mercy that He is giving respite to people in spite of their rebelliousness. Readers may now study these verses in the light of this background.

وَنُفِّخَ فِي الصُّورِ فَإِذَا هُمْ مِنَ الْأَجْدَاثِ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يَنْسِلُونَ (٥١) قَالُوا يَا وَيْلَنَا مَن بَعَثَنَا مِن مَّرْقَدِنَا هَذَا مَا وَعَدَ الرَّحْمَنُ وَصَدَقَ الْمُرْسَلُونَ (٥٢) إِنْ كَانَتْ إِلَّا صَيْحَةً وَاحِدَةً فَإِذَا هُمْ جَمِيعٌ لَّدَيْنَا مُحْضَرُونَ (٥٣) فَالْيَوْمَ لَا تُظْلَمُ نَفْسٌ شَيْئًا وَلَا تُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ (٥٤) إِنَّ أَصْحَابَ الْجَنَّةِ الْيَوْمَ فِي شُغْلٍ فَكِهُونَ (٥٥) هُمْ وَأَزْوَاجُهُمْ فِي ظِلَالٍ عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ مُتَكَبِّرُونَ (٥٦) لَهُمْ فِيهَا فَاكِهَةٌ وَلَهُمْ مَّا يَدَّعُونَ (٥٧) سَلَامٌ قَوْلًا مِنْ رَبِّ رَحِيمٍ (٥٨) وَامْتَازُوا الْيَوْمَ أَيُّهَا الْمُجْرِمُونَ (٥٩) أَلَمْ أَعْهِدْ إِلَيْكُمْ يَا بَنِي آدَمَ أَن لَّا تَعْبُدُوا الشَّيْطَانَ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ (٦٠) وَأَنْ اعْبُدُونِي هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ (٦١) وَلَقَدْ أَضَلَّ مِنْكُمْ جِبِلًّا كَثِيرًا أَفَلَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْقِلُونَ (٦٢) هَذِهِ جَهَنَّمُ الَّتِي كُنتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ (٦٣) اضْلُوهَا الْيَوْمَ بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَكْفُرُونَ (٦٤) الْيَوْمَ نَخْتِمُ عَلَىٰ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَتُكَلِّمُنَا أَيْدِيهِمْ وَتَشْهَدُ أَرْجُلُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ (٦٥) وَلَوْ نَشَاءُ لَطَمَسْنَا عَلَىٰ أَعْيُنِهِمْ فَاسْتَبَقُوا الصِّرَاطَ فَأَنَّى يُبْصِرُونَ (٦٦) وَلَوْ نَشَاءُ لَمَسَخْنَاهُمْ عَلَىٰ مَكَانَتِهِمْ فَمَا اسْتَطَاعُوا مُضِيًّا وَلَا يَرْجِعُونَ (٦٧) وَمَنْ نُعَمِّرْهُ نُنَكِّسْهُ فِي الْخَلْقِ أَفَلَا يَعْقِلُونَ (٦٨)

And the trumpet shall be sounded; so they will suddenly come out of their graves and hasten towards their Lord. They will say: "Our

misfortune! Who has raised us from our grave? This is the same thing which the Merciful God has promised us and the word of the messengers has come true. It will only be a shout; so all of a sudden they will be brought to Our presence. (51-53)

So, today no soul shall suffer any injustice. And you shall be rewarded according only to what you had been doing. Indeed, the dwellers of Paradise will be involved in their things of interest. Together with their wives, they shall recline upon soft couches in shade. And they shall have fruits therein, and all that they desire. They shall be conveyed salutations from the Merciful Lord. (54-58)

And O wrongdoers!: “Away with you this day! And sons of Adam! Did I not direct you never to worship Satan; indeed he is your acknowledged foe. And to worship Me alone? This only is the straight path. And he has led a vast majority among you astray. So do you not understand? This is the Hell you had been threatened with. Enter in it now because of your disbelief.” (59-64)

Today We shall seal their mouths and their hands will inform Us, and their very feet will testify to what they had been doing. (65)

And had it been Our will, We could have effaced their eyes; then if they went towards the path how would have they seen it? And had it been Our will, We could have defaced them where they stood so that they could neither go forward nor retrace their steps. And We reverse the growth of those to whom We give long life. So do they not understand? (68)

Explanation

وَنُفِخَ فِي الصُّورِ فَإِذَا هُمْ مِنَ الْأَجْدَاثِ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يَنْسِلُونَ (٥١)³⁵

It has been mentioned in verses 48-49 earlier that if the punishment with which the Quraysh are being threatened is being deferred, then this is not because God has to make preparations for it which are not complete as yet; if God wants to send punishment He only needs a shout. Now, in this verse it is said that the matter of the Hereafter is no different. God does not require any preparation to bring it about; as soon as the trumpet is sounded, people will run towards their Lord. In other words, the implied meaning is that people who are trying to corner the Prophet (sws) by demanding the punishment or the Hereafter should remember that none of these tasks is difficult for God. They can happen in the blink of an eye. If in spite of this they are not being accomplished, then it only means that God wants people to benefit from this respite and

35. And the trumpet shall be sounded; so they will suddenly come out of their graves and hasten towards their Lord.

seek repentance and mend their ways.

قَالُوا يَا وَيْلَنَا مَن بَعَثَنَا مِن مَّرْقَدِنَا هَذَا مَا وَعَدَ الرَّحْمَنُ وَصَدَقَ الْمُرْسَلُونَ (٥٢)³⁶

The verse implies that these people who make fun will be dumb-struck with awe and fear and exclaim who has raised them from their graves. This question will not be meant to elicit an answer; they will pose it to express their misfortune. What they contended to be a bluff has come true!

There can be two possibilities regarding the speaker of the words: هَذَا هَذَا. One, that they are uttered by these very people: they would exclaim that what has happened was already in their information and that what the messengers of God had said has come true. Second, it is spoken by the angels on behalf of God in order to humiliate these people; they should now blame themselves for their misfortune; what has come before them is nothing but what had been informed to them by the Most Merciful through their messengers; but they never paid heed to it. I would prefer the second of these options because it is supported by parallel verses of the Qur'ān. It is said in Sūrah Saffāt:

فَإِنَّمَا هِيَ زَجْرَةٌ وَاحِدَةٌ فَإِذَا هُمْ يَنْظُرُونَ وَقَالُوا يَا وَيْلَنَا هَذَا يَوْمُ الدِّينِ هَذَا يَوْمُ
الْفَصْلِ الَّذِي كُنْتُمْ بِهِ تُكَذِّبُونَ (٣٧: ١٩-٢١)

Thus it shall be just one scream and they will look about. And they will say: “Woe betide us! This is the Day of Reckoning.” This is the Judgement Day which you had been denying.

The last of the above sentences can only be communicated to them from God at the right time to humiliate them.

إِن كَانَتْ إِلَّا صَيْحَةً وَاحِدَةً فَإِذَا هُمْ جَمِيعٌ لَدَيْنَا مُحْضَرُونَ (٥٣)³⁷

All this will happen in the blink of any eye merely by a shout from God. For this He will not need neither any trench nor any canon. Just as God can create anything merely by uttering the word *kun*, He can bring about the Day of Judgement with just one shout. The word جَمِيعٌ is for

36. They will say: “Our misfortune! Who has raised us from our grave? This is the same thing which the Merciful God has promised us and the word of the messengers has come true.”

37. It will only be a shout; so all of a sudden they will be brought to Our presence.

emphasis. The implication is that they should not remain in any misconception that anyone will be able to escape God's grasp. After this, all their nobles and commoners, rulers and ruled, worshippers and deities will be seized and brought before God. The word مُحْضَرُونَ portrays their humiliating situation: they shall be brought before the presence of God the way criminals are brought in a court.

فَالْيَوْمَ لَا تُظْلَمُ نَفْسٌ شَيْئًا وَلَا تُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ (٥٤)³⁸

The style adopted in this verse is as if what is said in it is happening. The Day of Judgement has arrived and the addressees are being told about its arrival. Several examples of this style can be seen in the Qur'an.

The verse says that today is the day when perfect justice will manifest itself; no one will be wronged in the slightest way. The words وَلَا تُجْزَوْنَ إِلَّا مَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ depict perfect justice: people will be dealt such that they shall reap what they sowed. Obviously, when one is going to see what he himself earned, then no possibility of injustice or oppression remains in this.

إِنَّ أَصْحَابَ الْجَنَّةِ الْيَوْمَ فِي شُغْلٍ فَاكِهُونَ (٥٥) هُمْ وَأَزْوَاجُهُمْ فِي ظِلَالٍ عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ مُتَكِئُونَ (٥٦) لَهُمْ فِيهَا فَاكِهَةٌ وَلَهُمْ مَّا يَدَّعُونَ (٥٧) سَلَامٌ قَوْلًا مِنْ رَبِّ رَحِيمٍ (٥٨)³⁹

This is a portrayal of what will happen to the dwellers of Paradise. It is said that they will be engrossed in leisurely pursuits. The word شُغْلٌ occurs as an undefined noun to magnify its import.

The words هُمْ وَأَزْوَاجُهُمْ فِي ظِلَالٍ عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ مُتَكِئُونَ mention their wives signifying the fact that their wives too will be with them in their leisurely pursuits. They are specially mentioned because no leisurely pursuit is complete without one's family. The words عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ مُتَكِئُونَ depict the best of sitting places. In those times, kings and queens would sit on embellished thrones. The dwellers of Paradise in their eternal kingdom will also sit in this manner.

The words لَهُمْ فِيهَا فَاكِهَةٌ وَلَهُمْ مَّا يَدَّعُونَ state that in Paradise they will be presented with fruits and moreover whatever else they ask for. The expression مَّا يَدَّعُونَ (whatever they demand) means مَّا يَشْتَهُونَ (whatever

38. So, today no soul shall suffer any injustice. And you shall be rewarded according only to what you had been doing.

39. Indeed, the dwellers of Paradise will be involved in their things of interest. Together with their wives, they shall recline upon soft couches in shade. And they shall have fruits therein, and all that they desire. They shall be conveyed salutations from the Merciful Lord.

they desire). It needs to be kept in consideration that the greatest of kings in this world never had this status and position that whatever he wants he is able to get it immediately. However, the dwellers of Paradise will have this prerogative and will continue to enjoy it.

The words *قَوْلًا مِنْ رَبِّ رَحِيمٍ* mention the greatest success achieved by the dwellers of Paradise. They shall be conveyed salutations from God. In my opinion, the construction of the sentence is thus: *تَحِيَّتُهُمْ سَلَامٌ*. The inchoative (*mubtadā'*) is suppressed here so that all the attention of the addressee is focused on the enunciative (*khavar*). In Sūrah Ahzāb, the words are: *تَحِيَّتُهُمْ يَوْمَ يَلْقَوْنَهُ سَلَامٌ*. (And they shall be welcomed by *salām* on the day they will meet Him, (33:44)). It is evident from various narratives that angels will enter from all the doors of Paradise or communicate the *salām* of God to them. Who can even imagine this success reaped by the dwellers of Paradise on receiving salutations from their noble and merciful Lord:

بریں مژدہ گرجاں فشانم رواست

(Even sacrificing one's life on these glad tidings is acceptable.)

وَأَمَّا تَزُوا الْيَوْمَ أَيُّهَا الْمُجْرِمُونَ (٥٩) أَلَمْ أَعْهَدَ إِلَيْكُمْ يَا بَنِي آدَمَ أَنْ لَا تَعْبُدُوا الشَّيْطَانَ إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُبِينٌ (٦٠) وَأَنْ اعْبُدُونِي هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ (٦١) وَلَقَدْ أَضَلَّ مِنْكُمْ جِبِلًّا كَثِيرًا أَفَلَمْ تَكُونُوا تَعْقِلُونَ (٦٢)⁴⁰

After referring to the state of the dwellers of Paradise, these verses now mention the fate met by the wrongdoers. They shall be told on behalf of God that in the previous world they were blended and mixed up with His believers because that world was a place of trial and test; however, now is the time of reward and punishment; hence they must now separate from the believers and suffer the consequences of their deeds; now their world is separate from that of the believers.

When the word *عَهْدَ* is used with the preposition *إِلَى*, it encompasses the meaning of being made responsible of something and standing as guarantor to something. Thus for example, in Sūrah Baqarah the words are: *وَعَهَدْنَا لِيِٰرَاهِيْمَ وَاِسْمَاعِيْلَ أَنْ طَهَّرَا بَيْتِي لِلطَّائِفِيْنَ* (٢: ١٢٥) (And We obligated Abraham and Ishmael to cleanse Our House for those who will come to

40. And O wrongdoers!: "Away with you this day! Sons of Adam! Did I not direct you never to worship Satan; indeed he is your acknowledged foe. And to worship Me alone? This only is the straight path. And he has led a vast majority among you astray. So do you not understand?"

walk round it, (2:125)). The next verses remind the wrongdoers in a rebuking way; they will be asked that as sons of Adam were they not bound by the promise of never to worship Satan; he is their inveterate foe; they could have reached the Almighty by just adhering to this straight path; however, they ended up so unfortunate that Satan was able to lead astray a great many among them; did they not have even this acumen as to know friend from foe; did they not remember that it was Satan who deceived their forefathers and had them expelled from Paradise and that his enmity with the progeny of Adam is till the Day of Judgement.

Satan's enmity, his challenge, God's reminder to Adam's progeny and other related aspects referred to here are mentioned in detail in previous *sūrahs* – in particular, Sūrah Baqarah and Sūrah A'rāf. Readers may understand this concise mention here in the light of the comprehensive mention in these referred to *sūrahs*.

هَذِهِ جَهَنَّمُ الَّتِي كُنْتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ (٦٣) اَصْلَوْهَا الْيَوْمَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْفُرُونَ (٦٤)⁴¹

The verse states that if these people did not remember the covenant of God and His warning, then its fate is before them in the form of Hell. God's messengers and His pious people warned them of this fate but they continued to deny it; now they should enter it; it is now their abode.

الْيَوْمَ نَخْتِمُ عَلَىٰ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَتُكَلِّمُنَا أَيْدِيهِمْ وَتَشْهَدُ أَرْجُلُهُمْ بِمَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ (٦٥)⁴²

In the previous verse, the address was direct and in this verse it has become indirect. The reason is that the previous verse expresses wrath and rebuke for which a direct address is very appropriate. On the contrary, this verse portrays their helplessness for which the indirect style of address is more apt. The verse states that on the Day of Judgement the Almighty will seal their mouths and give speech to their hands and feet which will narrate to God the details of their misdeeds. The reason that mouths will be sealed is that the tongue can lie and also present lame excuses; however, the hands and feet will narrate only that which they did. In this manner, the limbs of a person will deliver conclusive verdict against him and no verdict can be greater than this one. This topic is also discussed in Sūrah Raḥmān in the following

41. This is the Hell you had been threatened with. Enter in it now because of your disbelief."

42. Today We shall seal their mouths and their hands will inform Us, and their very feet will testify to what they had been doing.

words: *فَيَوْمَئِذٍ لَا يُسْأَلُ عَنْ ذَنْبِهِ إِنْسٌ وَلَا جَانٌّ... يُعْرَفُ الْمُجْرِمُونَ بِسِيمَاهُمْ فَيُؤْخَذُ بِالنَّوَاصِي* (Thus on that day, there will be no need to ask neither man nor jinn of his sins ...The wrongdoers will be recognized by their signs; thus they shall be seized by their forelocks and their feet [and thrown in Hell]). (55:39-41)

وَلَوْ نَشَاءُ لَطَمَسْنَا عَلَى أَعْيُنِهِمْ فَاسْتَبَقُوا الصِّرَاطَ فَأَنَّى يُبْصِرُونَ (٦٦)⁴³

The verse implies that when these people are not using their faculties and abilities bestowed to them by God they deserve to be deprived from them and this task is not the slightest difficult for God. If He wanted, He could have obliterated their eyes and then they would have been left to wonder about and would never have found the way. However, if God did not do this then it is only His mercy and they still have a chance to benefit from this gracious respite from Him and not shut their eyes. The particle *لَوْ* signifies a conditional sentence in the past and in my opinion there is an incomplete verb suppressed before the indefinite verb. The actual construction would be: *وَلَوْ كُنَّا نَشَاءُ*.

وَلَوْ نَشَاءُ لَمَسَخْنَاهُمْ عَلَى مَكَانَتِهِمْ فَمَا اسْتَطَاعُوا مُضِيًّا وَلَا يَرْجِعُونَ (٦٧)⁴⁴

In a similar way, had God wanted He would have disfigured them in their very places and then they would not have been able to move forward or backward. However, out of His grace God did not do this and had given respite to them so that if they want they can mend their ways: they should recognize their obligation to God's favours, duly honour them and be grateful to God.

وَمَنْ نُعَمِّرْهُ نُنَكِّسْهُ فِي الْخَلْقِ أَفَلَا يَعْقِلُونَ (٦٨)⁴⁵

This verse furnishes an argument from human observation on the threat sounded in the previous verses: It is not difficult at all to disfigure and distort the abilities of people. When a person comes into being he is a lump of meat. Then God gave him strength so that when he reaches adolescence all his natural abilities are at their pinnacle. After that, old age afflicts a person and he gradually returns to a state of weakness and

43. Had it been Our will, We could have effaced their eyes; then if they went towards the path how would have they seen it?

44. And had it been Our will, We could have defaced them where they stood so that they could neither go forward nor retrace their steps.

45. And We reverse the growth of those to whom We give long life. So do they not understand?

helplessness the way he was when he was born. The Qur'ān has portrayed this state of his in the following words: **اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ مِنْ ضَعْفٍ** (It is God Who created you from weakness; then gave you strength after weakness, then after strength gave weakness and old age (30:54)). This is a general portrayal. Everyone who passes through childhood and old age experiences this situation. The weakness in one's strength and potential is experienced the most by those who reach old age. The Qur'ān has depicted this state in the following words: **وَمِنْكُمْ مَنْ يُرَدُّ إِلَى أَرْدَلِ الْعُمُرِ لِكَيْ لَا يَعْلَمَ بَعْدَ عِلْمٍ شَيْئًا** (And of you there are some who are sent back to senility, so that they know nothing even after knowing, 27:70)).

The verse under discussion refers to this situation and states that the abilities and strength of people who are made to live till their old age are gradually made to diminish by God. In other words, the phase of weakness with which a person began his life is returned to him. It is evident from this that all his abilities and his strengths are bestowed to him by God; He can take them away whenever he wants to and can take them away in such a manner that a person is helpless before Him; so unfortunate are the people who do not duly honour the favours of God and instead of being grateful to Him for receiving them they become arrogant.

Most lexicographers regard **نكس** and **تنكيس** to have the same meaning ie. "to make something to turn back." However, in my opinion, the former word also encompasses gradual progression in it. In other words, **تنكيس** would mean "to make something turn back gradually." The Qur'ān has used both these words and at both places this difference is found. The word **خلق** here means **خلقت** (physical shape) and it is used thus in the Qur'ān.

Section V: Verses (69-83)

Coming up are the closing verses of the *sūrah*. Here the topic discussed in the opening verses is taken up once again. Readers may remember that the *sūrah* began with an oath sworn by the Qur'ān replete with wisdom. This Book was presented as a proof of Muḥammad's prophethood. He was assured that through this Book the Almighty has done a great favour to the unlettered Arabs; yet only those will believe in it who have the vibrancy of life in them. After this introductory passage, the discourse shifted to the validation of the various claims made by the Qur'ān. Here too, in the concluding section of the *sūrah*, this sequence can be seen in a new style. First, the Hypocrites are refuted who regarded the Qur'ān to

be poetry and the Prophet (sws) to be a poet; after this, it is explained which people will be influenced by this Book and which will remain deprived of it. After this, some very prominent signs of God's providence are alluded to in order to once again invite people to show gratitude to God – something that informs the basis of this *sūrah*. After this, the discourse shifts to sound assurance to the Prophet (sws): he should not grieve on what people are saying to oppose him; There should be no wonder if these people make fun of him as they are the ones who do not even refrain from phabtiyan on God; he should consign their matter to God. Readers may now study these verses in the light of this background.

وَمَا عَلَّمْنَاهُ الشَّعْرَ وَمَا يَنْبَغِي لَهُ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ وَقُرْآنٌ مُبِينٌ (٦٩) لِيُنْذِرَ مَنِ كَانَ حَيًّا وَيَحِقِّ الْقَوْلُ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ (٧٠) أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّا خَلَقْنَا لَهُمْ مِمَّا عَمِلَتْ أَيْدِينَا أَنْعَامًا فَهُمْ لَهَا مَالِكُونَ (٧١) وَذَلَّلْنَاهَا لَهُمْ فَمِنْهَا رَكُوبُهُمْ وَمِنْهَا يَأْكُلُونَ (٧٢) وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا مَنَافِعُ وَمَشَارِبُ أَفَلَا يَشْكُرُونَ (٧٣) وَاتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ آلِهَةً لَعَلَّهُمْ يُنْصَرُونَ (٧٤) لَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ نَصْرَهُمْ وَهُمْ لَهُمْ جُنْدٌ مُحَضَّرُونَ (٧٥) فَلَا يَخْزُنكَ قَوْلُهُمْ إِنَّا نَعْلَمُ مَا يُسِرُّونَ وَمَا يُعْلِنُونَ (٧٦) أَوَلَمْ يَرَ الْإِنْسَانُ أَنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ فَإِذَا هُوَ خَصِيمٌ مُبِينٌ (٧٧) وَضَرَبَ لَنَا مَثَلًا وَنَسِيَ خَلْقَهُ قَالَ مَنْ يُحْيِي الْعِظَامَ وَهِيَ رَمِيمٌ (٧٨) قُلْ يُحْيِيهَا الَّذِي أَنْشَأَهَا أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ خَلْقٍ عَلِيمٌ (٧٩) الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُم مِّنَ الشَّجَرِ الْأَخْضَرِ نَارًا فَإِذَا أَنْتُمْ مِنْهُ تُوقَدُونَ (٨٠) أَوَلَيْسَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِقَادِرٍ عَلَى أَنْ يَخْلُقَ مِثْلَهُمْ بَلَىٰ وَهُوَ الْخَلَّاقُ الْعَلِيمُ (٨١) إِنَّمَا أَمْرُهُ إِذَا أَرَادَ شَيْئًا أَنْ يَقُولَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ (٨٢) فَسُبْحَانَ الَّذِي يَبْدِئُ مَلَكُوتَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ (٨٣)

And We have not taught him poetry nor is this befitting for him. This is but a reminder and an eloquent Qur'an so that it may inform those who have life in them and leave the disbelievers with no excuse. (69-70)

Have they not reflected that among things We have made with Our hands We made beasts for them. Thus they are their masters. And We have made them subservient to them; hence they ride on some and obtain sustenance from others; and they have other uses in them also and things to drink. So do they not show gratitude? (71-73)

And in the hope of being helped they have set up other gods besides God. They will not be able to help them: in fact, they will become armies brought forth. So let not what they say grieve you. We know what they

conceal and what they reveal. (74-76)

Has man not reflected that We created him from a drop of fluid; then he became an open rival. And he made fun of Me and forgot his own creation. He says: “Now, who can give life to bones when they have decayed?” Say: “He who created the first time will give them life.” And He is full aware of every creature. It is He Who produced fire from a lush green tree and lo! You light a fire from it. Is He Who created the heavens and the earth not capable of making creations like them? Yes, He is capable and He is the real Creator and all-knowing. His matter is such that when He intends to do something He need only say: “Be,” and it is. So glory be to Him Who has control of all things and to Him shall you all be returned. (77-83)

Explanation

وَمَا عَلَّمْنَاهُ الشُّعْرَ وَمَا يَنْبَغِي لَهُ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ وَقُرْآنٌ مُبِينٌ (٦٩)⁴⁶

The antecedent of the accusative pronoun in عَلَّمْنَاهُ is the Prophet (sws). This is actually a refutation of people who regard the Qur’ān to be poetry and the Prophet (sws) to be a poet. It is said that neither has God taught him poetry nor is poetry befitting for him. This is an answer given to those who would regard the sublime eloquence of the Qur’ān to be a product of the powerful elocution of its presenter. Their purpose was to mitigate the effect of the Qur’ān on the masses lest they believe in its divinity by being influenced by its powerful nature. In order to lure their masses away from the Qur’ān and the Prophet (sws) they would say that indeed the Qur’ān is a very eloquent and articulate Book; however, this eloquence and articulacy is not because it is a divine revelation as is being claimed by its presenter; it is potent and persuasive much like the powerful poetry composed by their outstanding poets and literati; hence, at best this person should be considered as a great poet instead of a prophet and messenger and this Qur’ān should be regarded as poetry and not a divine revelation. The Qur’ān has refuted this notion in various styles at various instances specially in Sūrah Shu‘arā’ the difference between a prophet and a poet which even a common man can see is pointed out in detail. Those who would like to see its details may look it up.

The expression وَمَا يَنْبَغِي لَهُ means that poetry is something of lesser in status to a prophet. This has two aspects:

One of them is that there is a world of difference between the traditions and characteristics of prophets and poets. In Sūrah Shu‘arā’ three

46. And We have not taught him poetry nor is this befitting for him. This is but a reminder and an eloquent Qur’ān.

characteristics of poets are mentioned and all three are against the stature of the institution of prophethood.

Their first characteristic mentioned is that they only make tall claims and do not practice what they preach. On the contrary, a prophet practices the most what he preaches.

Their second characteristic is that their compositions are a collection of contradictory thoughts; he wanders in every field and in one breath talks both of belief and disbelief. On the contrary, there exists tremendous harmony between the principles and corollaries of every thing he utters and a great sequence and correspondence in what he says.

Their third characteristic is that only people who have strayed away from the truth follow poets. On the contrary, the followers of the prophets of God are noble and pious people.

Although there are some exceptions to this rule referred to by the Qur'ān yet they are very few. For this reason, the Almighty has protected his prophets from the evil touch of poetry.

The second aspect which makes poetry something of lesser in status to a prophet is that all poetry relates to emotions: it arises from emotions and also effects emotions. It stimulates good emotions if its content is good and evil ones if its content is evil. Outside this sphere it has no influence. The mission of the prophets of God does not relate merely to emotions; it relates to every aspect of human life; hence its real appeal is to human intellect which guides a person in every sphere of life. It is not that only the emotions of people need to be stimulated; people also need to be morally instructed, their mistakes need to be rectified and they need to be taught the individual and collective principles of life and also instructed in the rules and principles of state-craft. In short, prophets of God need to instruct and teach people how to achieve success in this world and the next. All this obviously are beyond the scope of poetry. These needs cannot be fulfilled by a poet and his poetical compositions; they can only be fulfilled through a clear book from God. For this reason, God did make his messengers as poets but the recipients of His Books.

Here it is possible that a question may arise in the mind of some that if poetry is something lesser in stature to prophethood and its objectives, then why did God give the Psalms to David (sws) in the form of poetry? The answer to this question is that the real book of guidance for David (sws) was the Torah and not the Psalms. The status of the Psalms is that of an addendum to the Torah which is composed of prayers, supplications and sermons and wise counsels of David (sws). Together with the Torah, it is a very blessed treasure trove of wisdom; however, without the Torah it is not sufficient to fulfill the objective for which messengers of God are sent.

The words *إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ وَقُرْآنٌ مُبِينٌ* imply that this Qur'ān is not a collection of poetry; on the contrary, it is a great reminder and a clear book of guidance so that it can become a means of reformation and guidance of people. It reminds people of the facts innately found in human nature; it also reminds people of the history of divine guidance that stretches from Adam (sws) to Muḥammad (sws) and also reminds them of the consequences they will have to face in this world and the next if they deny the messengers of God.

The words *قُرْآنٌ مُبِينٌ* refer to the fact that the Qur'ān is a comprehensive book of guidance which has unambiguous, sound and well-reasoned advice for every aspect of life. It explains every fact so clearly that no doubt remains in the mind of a fair person. What relation can such a well-reasoned, clear and codified book have with poetry! In the whole annals of mankind, no poet has produced such a book.

⁴⁷ *لِيُنْذِرَ مَن كَانَ حَيًّا وَيَحَقِّقَ الْقَوْلَ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ (٧٠)*

The subject of the verb *يُنْذِرَ* is the Prophet Muḥammad (sws). This verse states the objective of revelation of the Qur'ān: the Almighty has revealed this Qur'ān to His Messenger so that through it he can warn people who are intellectually and spiritually alive. As for those whose hearts are dead, they will not be able to benefit from this Book. However, the truth shall stand conclusively conveyed to them and they will not be able to present this excuse before God that no warner had come to them otherwise they would have paid heed to his guidance.

The verb *انذار* (warning) here is in its complete meaning and the word *حَيٌّ* refers to those whose hearts are alive. A warner warns everyone yet his warning is effective for those whose nature is alive and vibrant; this because it is only such people who pay heed as is evident from the verse: *إِنَّمَا تُنْذِرُ مَنِ اتَّبَعَ الذِّكْرَ (٣٦: ١١)* (You can only warn those who pay heed, (36:11)). Since only such people can really be regarded as the living, the Qur'ān calls only them as the living. Those who are devoid of this capability are not alive; they are dead. Thus about such people, the Qur'ān states: *وَمَا أَنتَ بِمُسْمِعٍ بَمَنٍ فِي الْقُبُورِ (٣٥: ٢٢)* (you are not one who can recite out to those who are in the graves, (35:22)). The style adopted in the verse under discussion sounds an assurance to the Prophet (sws) as well. His task is to awaken the living; it is not his responsibility to awaken the dead. This topic is discussed repeatedly in the Qur'ān in

47. So that it may inform those who have life in them and leave the disbelievers with no excuse.

various styles.

The word قَوْل refers to the statement given by the Almighty in response to the challenge thrown by Satan. He had said that for the guidance of Adam's progeny, He will reveal His Book and guidance and that those who follow Satan even after this will be cast into Hell by Him.

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّا خَلَقْنَا لَهُمْ مِمَّا عَمِلَتْ أَيْدِينَا أَنْعَامًا فَهُمْ لَهَا مَالِكُونَ (٧١) وَذَلَّلْنَاهَا لَهُمْ فَمِنْهَا رَكُوبُهُمْ وَمِنْهَا يَأْكُلُونَ (٧٢) وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا مَنَافِعُ وَمَشَارِبُ أَفَلَا يَشْكُرُونَ (٧٣)⁴⁸

In order to understand the context and occasion of these verses, readers may take a look at verses 33-35 of this *sūrah*. Just as there after referring to the warning sounded by Qur'ān and to its message of monotheism attention was directed to certain signs of God's providence and then the addressees were asked to show gratitude to God, here too after directing their attention to certain signs of God's providence that substantiate the preaching of the Qur'ān, they have been asked to show gratitude to God. In other words, what was said in the introductory section of the *sūrah* is once again taken up in the closing section in a new style.

The verse أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّا خَلَقْنَا لَهُمْ مِمَّا عَمِلَتْ أَيْدِينَا أَنْعَامًا فَهُمْ لَهَا مَالِكُونَ states that do they not reflect that God created beasts through His power and wisdom and then made man their master. He uses them to his advantage with full freedom and fulfils his needs. The expression أَيْدِينَا implies the same thing as what expression وَمَا عَمِلَتْهُ أَيْدِيهِمْ that occurred earlier in verse 35 implied. The implication is that these things by their very existence show that only God's power and wisdom has created them; no other being could dare do so or bring them into man's subservience. It is only the graciousness of the Almighty that He created these things through His power and wisdom and made man their master. The implication is that this situation invites man to reflect whether this great blessing of God imposes any responsibility on him or not? The Qur'ān wants to direct the attention of people to this question and wants to inform them of its consequences but these foolish people regard this reminding to be poetry.

The words وَذَلَّلْنَاهَا لَهُمْ فَمِنْهَا رَكُوبُهُمْ وَمِنْهَا يَأْكُلُونَ imply that it is only God's providence and mercy that made these beasts conducive to man's

48. Have they not reflected that among things We have made with Our hands We have made beasts for them. Thus they are their masters. And We made them subservient to them; hence they ride on some and obtain sustenance from others; and they have other uses in them also and things to drink. So do they not show gratitude?

financial needs and then made them so submissive to him that he can use them in any way he wants to. Had God not intended, neither would these beasts have been conducive to man's needs nor could he have been able to make him submissive to him. After all, there are so many animals in this world which are neither useful to man with regard to his needs nor can they be made docile like beasts. Even if he is able to vanquish them, they may become a burden for him but never useful for him to lift his burden. The verse states that among these beasts are some which are used by man as a means of transport and others which he uses as fodder.

The words وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا مَنَافِعُ وَمَشَارِبُ أَفَلَا يَشْكُرُونَ imply that besides providing transport and fodder they also provide many other benefits: their hides, their hair, their bones and their faeces – in short almost every part of their bodies is useful to mankind. Similarly, their milk and its by-products like yogurt and curds are delicious, healthy and nutritious for man. The expression أَفَلَا يَشْكُرُونَ means that do not these favours and blessings entail an obligation on them and not demand from them that they should show gratitude and be obedient to the God who has bestowed these favours on them. These favours by their very existence are giving this message to man and the Book of God too is reminding man of this very message. The implication is that why are people trying to evade the Qur'ān by regarding it to be poetry instead of understanding and believing in such a clear fact.

وَاتَّخَذُوا مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ آلِهَةً لَّعَلَّهُم يُنصَرُونَ (٧٤) لَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ نَصْرَهُمْ وَهُمْ لَهُم جُنْدٌ مُّحْضَرُونَ (٧٥)⁴⁹

The implication of this verse is that instead of facing this clear fact they adopted back doors to evade it. What was befitting for them was that they recognized the rights and obligations towards the God Whose favours they were benefitting from and fulfilled them. On the contrary, what they did was that they invented some false idols and by ritually serving these idols think that if ever God seizes them, then they will be able to evade His punishment through the help of these idols.

The verse لَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ نَصْرَهُمْ وَهُمْ لَهُم جُنْدٌ مُّحْضَرُونَ implies that not only will these idols not be able to help these people in the slightest way, they too as accomplices of these people will be called to the presence of God. Then, the Almighty will decide the punishment they deserve.

49. And in the hope of being helped they have set up other gods besides God. They will not be able to help them: in fact, they will become armies brought forth.

فَلَا يَحْزُنُكَ قَوْلُهُمْ إِنَّا نَعْلَمُ مَا يُسِرُّونَ وَمَا يُعْلِنُونَ (٧٦)⁵⁰

This verse sounds an assurance to the Prophet Muḥammad (sws). He is told that he should bear what these people say and not be stricken by grief. Let them call him by whatever names like poet, madman and fabricator they want to call him with. However, he should rest assured that the Almighty is aware of not only their secret conspiracies and pranks, He is also aware of what they overtly say. The implication is that when God knows everything, why should the Prophet (sws) be sorrowful; he is doing God's work and should keep on doing it; he should also trust that God alone is enough to deal with his enemies.

أَوَلَمْ يَرِ الْإِنْسَانُ أَنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُ مِنْ نُطْقَةٍ فَإِذَا هُوَ خَصِيمٌ مُبِينٌ (٧٧) وَضَرَبَ لَنَا مَثَلًا وَنَسِيَ خَلْقَهُ قَالَ مَنْ يُحْيِي الْعِظَامَ وَهِيَ رَمِيمٌ (٧٨)⁵¹

The word *إِنْسَانٌ* signify the Quraysh who are under discussion. This general word is used to express disgust.

The expression *ضرب مثل* means to cite an example or say some words of wisdom as well to utter sarcastic and make fun. Here this latter meaning is implied.

These verses are connected to those before them through two aspects: It relates to the assurance sounded to the Prophet (sws) in the previous verses and also to the obligations the Quraysh owe to the providence of God mentioned in the verses prior to these.

The connection to the first of the above is that the Prophet (sws) is told that what more can be expected from the arrogant who phabtee chust on God and while forgetting their creation very haughtily question that who can raise life from dead and decayed bones if they pass sarcastic remarks on the Prophet (sws) and call him a poet and madman.

The connection to the second is that just as providence entails gratitude and believing in one God, it also entails a day of reward and punishment. This aspect is explained at various places in this exegesis. However, such is the meanness of man that in spite of benefitting from the favours of God he is not ready to acknowledge that a day of reward and punishment is bound to come where he shall be held accountable about these favours;

50. So let not what they say grieve you. We know what they conceal and what they reveal.

51. Has man not reflected that We created him from a drop of fluid; yet he became an open rival. And he made fun of Me and forgot his own creation. He says: "Now, who can give life to bones when they have decayed?"

also, whenever he is reminded of this fact, he becomes a rival and while forgetting how he was created sarcastically asks that who can raise dead and decayed bones to life. The verse states that he should be told that the one who gave them life the first time will raise them to life again. If creating them the first time was not of a bother to Him, how can it be bothersome for Him to re-create them?

The words *وَنَسِيَ خَلْقَهُ* imply that such a stupid question can only be asked by someone who has forgotten his own process of creation. He who remembers that God created him from clay will never ask such a question. If he does pose this question, then it means that he has become God's rival who is ready to fight with Him

قُلْ يُحْيِيهَا الَّذِي أَنشَأَهَا أَوَّلَ مَرَّةٍ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ خَلْقٍ عَلِيمٌ (٧٩)⁵²

The word *خَلَقَ* here signifies creatures. In other words, God is aware of all His creatures. In Sūrah Mulk, the words used are: *أَلَا يَعْلَمُ مَنْ خَلَقَ وَهُوَ* (Would He who not know Who has created, (67:14)). No one should be deceived by the fact that God will forget him once he dies and mixes in the dust. He is aware of every bit and part of their body. In Sūrah Qāf, it is said: *قَدْ عَلِمْنَا مَا تَنْقُصُ الْأَرْضُ مِنْهُمْ وَعِنْدَنَا كِتَابٌ حَفِيظٌ* (Even what the earth consumes of their bodies is in Our notice and with Us is also a book that keeps record, (50:4)).

الَّذِي جَعَلَ لَكُم مِّنَ الشَّجَرِ الْأَخْضَرِ نَارًا فَإِذَا أَنْتُمْ مِّنْهُ تُوقِدُونَ (٨٠)⁵³

The implication is that they should not regard it improbable that life will emerge from ashes and clay. They often see the creation of elements from opposing elements. By striking two branches of a lush green tree they create fire. How can it be improbable for the God Who has shown this majesty to make life appear from ashes and clay. The expression *الشَّجَرِ الْأَخْضَرِ* refers to trees found in certain areas of Arabia and those who travel through deserts use them as firestone.

Some of our earlier scholars have interpreted this verse differently; however, I find it to be far-fetched. The interpretation given above is absolutely clear. Certain trees found in Arabia were used as firestone by people. Books also mention their names. If today these trees do not exist or rarely exist, then this does not matter. Various things continue to go extinct in this world by the directive of God. If the foremost addressees

52. Say: "He who created the first time will give them life." And he is fully aware of every creature.

53. It is He Who produced fire from a lush green tree and lo! You light a fire from it.

of the Qur'ān were aware of such things, then this reasoning is very appropriate. The real basis of this reasoning is that examples of opposing elements coming into being from opposing elements exist in this world and such is the established nature of this fact that no one can dispute it. Who does not know that the greatest of fires is found within water!

أَوَلَيْسَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِقَادِرٍ عَلَى أَنْ يَخْلُقَ مِثْلَهُمْ بَلَىٰ وَهُوَ الْخَلَّاقُ الْعَلِيمُ (٨١)⁵⁴

This verse refutes the notion of improbability of re-creation of man in another way: How can the God Who created these heavens and the earth without any difficulty not be able to create people like them? They should think which is the more difficult of the two tasks. The words *بَلَىٰ وَهُوَ الْخَلَّاقُ الْعَلِيمُ* are an answer to this question by God Himself. The attributes of God mentioned are meant to substantiate the earlier premise. It is said that He is the real Creator having all knowledge. In verse 79, the words used are: *وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ خَلْقٍ عَلِيمٌ* (and he is fully aware of every creature). Here precisely the same thing is said in much more powerful words. It is emphatically said that God is the supreme creator; no one should be misled to believe that He got tired after creating this world or His power of creativity has finished; on the contrary, He is fresh as before and is fully aware of the ingredients of all His creatures; whenever He wants He will bring each and every part together to re-create them.

إِنَّمَا أَمْرُهُ إِذَا أَرَادَ شَيْئًا أَنْ يَقُولَ لَهُ كُنْ فَيَكُونُ (٨٢)⁵⁵

The implication of this verse is that no one should remain in the misconception that to create something God needs factories, investment raw material or machines. God does not need anything to implement His intentions. When He intends to do something, He only gives a directive and His intention materializes according to this directive.

فَسُبْحَانَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ مَلَكُوتُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ (٨٣)⁵⁶

The word *مَلَكُوت* means “authority and sovereignty.” Here at the end,

54. Is He Who created the heavens and the earth not capable of making creations like them? Yes, He is capable and He is the real Creator and all-knowing.

55. His matter is such that when He intends to do something He need only say: “Be,” and it is.

56. So glory be to Him Who has control of all things and to Him shall you all be returned.

the addressees of the *sūrah* are warned that since the God in Whose hands are the reins of everything and to Whom everyone must return is free of any defect or shortcoming, hence they too should accept Him in this exalted capacity and continue to extol Him. No one is His partner in His being, attributes or rights. He is beyond and above any form of association. He has not created this world without a purpose. Hence, each person will have to come forth before Him and be held accountable for his deeds. It is not the least difficult for Him to create people again once they die and decay; He has power over everything. His knowledge embraces everything; nothing is beyond His observation; no word or deed of a person is hidden from Him.

With help and guidance of God, the *tafsīr* of this *sūrah* reaches its completion. فلحمد لله على ذلك (so gratitude of God be on this)

Raḥmānābād,
8th March, 1975
